

To the esteemed members of the Government Operations Committee:

My sincere thanks to each of you for providing these hearings on probably the most important task that is on the education agenda, not just for the Detroit Public Schools, not just for Wayne County, but really for schools across our entire state.

Senators Ananich and Kowall, you have been champions for a variety of education issues. Senator Meekhof, your leadership in the Senate moving forward many of the issues surrounding DPS are appreciated, and Senator Hood you know more about what is happening on a daily basis in DPS than all of us and bring such an important perspective to this issue. Last, I would like to give special recognition to Senator Hansen, who has taken the lead working with so many stakeholders to do his best to bring forward a solution to such a pressing issue. I am confident you all can bring together a legislative solution that will be good for not just DPS, but for schools across the state. Again, the stakes here extend well beyond the Detroit borders.

I don't need to review the details of the issue before you. They are well documented and you all have been well briefed. What I hope to do today is provide my perspective to the conversation, share with you, in my opinion, what in the proposed bills can work well – and offer my suggestions of what may make sense to address in these bills or subsequent bills that will put us in a position not just to address the immediate financial crisis, but more importantly, what will position us to ASSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN IN DETROIT HAVE ACCESS TO A QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM MOVING FORWARD.

I believe I can offer you an analysis from a unique vantage point. The work of our organization, Wayne RESA, interfaces with DPS every day. We are in DPS classrooms providing support to teachers and leaders in priority schools, we are supervising the GSRP preschool programs, our staff provides service to English Language Learners in DPS schools, we work regularly with the staff who provide the County-wide special education programs, we train DPS teachers, we provide a variety of back end services supporting the district operation, and this year we have provided a staff person to work directly with the upper level administration to support the central office restructuring that is going on.

In addition, I bring 25 years of experience as a Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer to this work. I was there when Proposal A went into effect in 1994, when choice programs were implemented in Michigan, when Emergency Managers were appointed in Detroit, and everything in between.

What I see in DPS is promise and heartbreak. Some of the finest schools in Michigan are within the borders of Detroit. And it also holds some of our largest challenges. If I can share just one example of what I mean, I have visited the Charles Wright Academy – a school in a section of the community with the largest percentage of homeless citizens in the entire city. Here the

teachers park their cars in a locked parking lot for safety, and yet inside the school its magic. It is the perfect environment inside the school. Calm in the hallways, data walls outside the classrooms showing a clear picture of where each student is in their progress, classrooms where students are dressed in uniforms, engaged in learning and excited about school. The teachers talk about what they are doing to improve student performance with best classroom practices. Leadership at the school talk about what they have done to move forward an aggressive improvement effort, in concert with Wayne RESA, and the success they have had. They beam about their progress. They were recently taken off the priority school list – starting at the very bottom of the state “top to bottom” school ranking list, moving up in five years to the 34th percentile. An amazing growth. What I saw is what I would see in the highest performing schools in the state. And when I ask them if there was one thing I could do for them what would it be, they respond that they just want to keep the staff together so they can continue their work, and that maybe we could do something for their teachers who are facing payless paydays after numerous concessions. In DPS, with such a shortage of teachers, there is no guarantee the staff will be able to stay together. And understandably, with the current financial condition of the district, they are concerned what their future, and the future of their students will be. Promise and Heartbreak.

The example I share shows the possibility and the reality of the situation. This conversation is not just about the financial issues confronting the district, but again, how do we make sure we are providing a quality education to all students. The work at Charles Wright is a microcosm of what good urban education reform is made up of, as supported by the research of those that have studied Boston, Charlotte, Montgomery County, and the differences in reform work in Newark and other cities in the recently released book, “The Prize”. That is schools need stability and consistency. There are no quick fixes. Improvement comes from within. It is not a revolution but an evolution. Leadership needs to support a clear direction and the work needs to focus on what is occurring in classrooms. Quality staff, clear expectations, a strong curriculum and related materials available to teachers, strong wrap-around services such as tiered interventions; preschool; outreach, etc... This is what we know works, and we need to make sure these bills provide this type of framework.

So let's take a look at the bills proposed. There are several components included in the bills that indeed do provide for this framework. This includes:

* A return to a governance model of local control that provides the opportunity for stability and consistency that is desperately needed. No more new leader with new ideas each year. It will be important that new leadership has the support of the community, the mayor's office and all stakeholders. They will need to create a clear direction for the work, focus it around needs in the classroom, and provide the time to implement reforms. This stability has

been a key indicator of successful reform in other areas and the structure in the current bills will allow for this to happen.

- * Start up resources to assure the district has the things needed to follow through on the reform efforts and implement the key components of good reform.

- * Funding stability by addressing the stifling debt payments that are currently crippling the existing budget. Eliminating the current debt will provide an added \$1,100 per student to the current budget. Even with much of this needed to address the current operating deficit, current figures show that at a minimum \$14 million could be reinvested back into the classroom. On average this is well over \$100,000 per school, which could repair schools, or reduce class size (adding up to two teachers per school), restore some employee concessions in order to allow the district to be more competitive in hiring, or purchase needed curriculum materials. This is separate from what could be done from the start up resources, and could be augmented with improvements to special education allocations or other ideas that can help the district moving forward.

It is important to note that it has been recommended that the debt relief to DPS would NOT come from the school aid fund. This has been a priority of legislators who have been working on these bills, and I would suggest is essential if we hope to have statewide buy-in for the proposal.

I also offer the following suggestions to the existing bills that I think would be important to assure all students have a quality education in DPS:

- * Strike the current proposal to have a separate CEO appointed to take over priority schools. This proposal is in direct opposition to the return of local control to a local school board and their appointed Superintendent. There is no good way to allocate authority between two parties within the same organization for critical decisions such as budget and staffing. This would be clumsy at best, and divisive at worst. If accountability and reform are concerns, I would highlight that all DPS priority schools will still have accountability responsibilities to the State Reform Office, just as all priority schools do in all districts across the state. They should be treated the same, or you are endangering one of the real tenants of urban reform – strong leadership support from all parties for the work being done by the newly created leadership.

- * Stability under the current state school funding system can only be created by some level of management of student enrollment. A Detroit Education Commission, or something along these lines, can help provide this type of stability. I want to highlight that this is not meant to be an anti-charter school statement or recommendation. On the contrary, because of the proliferation of schooling options within the city, some of our most successful charter schools face the same challenges that the public school system does. That is a less predictable

enrollment which makes it difficult to program for students. It is just the reality based on our current funding structure. A more stable enrollment pattern will allow for strong public schools and strong charter schools to assure their programming will be more predictable for parents.

* The newly elected local school board should select the new Superintendent. This is one of the most important functions of an elected school board, and not allowing this to occur could create a possible issue before this important work even begins. Again, all stakeholders need to rally around new officials in the school system for reform to work.

Again, I want to thank each of you for your genuine concern and valued leadership related to this work. I also want to thank you for taking feedback from interested parties during these hearings. Time is short. Action is needed to avoid a financial disaster not just for DPS, but for the entire state as it is the state that ultimately has backed the debt of DPS. I am most encouraged that the conversation is about how we create a school system in Detroit that meets the needs of all students, as opposed to "how do we just get out of the debt". Please know that Wayne RESA stands ready to provide whatever support is needed for DPS schools to be successful as we move forward with all interested parties.

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