



**STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
LANSING, MICHIGAN 48909**

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I am John Austin, President of the Michigan State Board of Education, and thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation, attentive to the learning crisis among Detroit's school children.

The State Board of Education is responsible for providing leadership and supervision over all public education, and making recommendations to the Legislature for requirements around same. At 45th in the nation in 4th grade reading proficiency, dead last among states for African-American students; with only 41% percent of our state high school students proficient in reading, we have much work to do to put Michigan back where we must be – among the top performing education states. I am happy to see good bi-partisan collaboration around our recently released Top 10 in 10 agenda to improve education achievement in Michigan, and I look forward to continued collaboration in executing strategies that can place Michigan among the top performing states in student achievement again.

I also applaud this Committee and its leadership for your sincere and serious work to address the even more severe learning crisis among school children in Detroit. The Legislation before you in lifting the debt burden on the DPS schools will ensure precious taxpayer resources go to support teaching and learning in the classroom and improvements in facilities and the woeful learning conditions that have been so vividly revealed of late. I applaud and encourage the efforts of this legislature and the Governor to find a way to erase this crushing state-owed debt burden before it grows worse without sacrificing educational resources for other schoolchildren in Michigan.

A speedy return to local democratic governance of the Detroit public schools will also go a long way to restore trust, and build shared support and ownership for the much-needed and urgent work of improving teaching and learning in Detroit, after years of state control, resentment and finger-pointing.

One area that impacts student achievement in Detroit that is important to include in this legislation is a change in the state's policies that have allowed new schools to be opened anywhere, without regard to community need nor attention to the quality of education. As Mayor Duggan, Detroit Coalition Members, Detroit community leaders, and my former colleague Dan Varner of Excellent Schools Detroit have so compelling shared with you, the Detroit public school marketplace is saturated with too many schools spending precious tax dollars, chasing too few students, and with no single quality standard. Only 40% of Detroit's school children are in DPS schools. Thirty-four thousand students are in Detroit charters that range from excellent to abysmal in their educational performance. With 164 public schools opened or closed in Detroit during the last 7 years, by 12 separate authorizers -- some neighborhoods

are saturated with schools, others have hardly any—the result can only be described as educational chaos.

I am a proponent of quality charters and enabling school choice as a strategy if it serves to improve learning outcomes. But as we are seeing play out in Detroit – and frankly many other school communities in Michigan -- absent any common standard for ensuring quality among new school offerings, we are getting the worst of all worlds. New schools proliferate willy-nilly and don't educate students any better; many do worse by students making the choice. Meanwhile fewer students are left in traditional and DPS schools. These are often students with the greatest special education and learning needs, now with fewer resources to provide excellent teachers and support services that can ensure they learn. This has the opposite effect of strategies proposed in our new top 10 agenda, that seek to attend to the learning impacts of poverty. Even high quality charters are undersubscribed and under-resourced in the "model" we have now—adversely affecting learning outcomes for all Detroit school children—whichever type of school they attend.

This is why I strongly encourage this legislature to take the opportunity provided by this legislation to create some locally governed entity or mechanism for managing all public schools that serve Detroit school children for quality, accessibility and to ensure long-term financial stability. Absent such a mechanism, this Legislature will be here again in 2-3 years, being asked to bail out the repurposed DPS schools; if they remain part of an educational marketplace ungoverned by common quality standards.

I also encourage this Legislature to appreciate that this challenge needs to be met, not just in Detroit, but on a statewide basis. Public schools in many of your own communities are under stress due to a new school creation and choice policy decoupled from a strategy for how it improves learning and educational performance. According to the Citizens Research Council, over the last dozen years, Michigan has seen total student population and enrollments drop by 200,000; while the number of school districts has increased from 560 to nearly 800. As we are seeing play out dramatically in Detroit, but also in many other communities across Michigan, there are too many schools chasing too few students and the dollars that flow with them. Until we get serious about reforming our school choice, charter and new school creation policies, we will remain where we are with poor academic achievement and learning outcomes, and nowhere near our goal of becoming a top 10 education state.