



Michigan Parents for Schools

Working for excellent public schools—for our children and our communities

Michigan Parents for Schools views on HB 6004 (H-1)

Thursday, November 29, 2012

While we appreciate that several concerns have been addressed in the H-1 substitute for HB 6004, sadly our main objections remain.

Key points:

- ❖ The bill continues to create a statewide school agency empowered to take over struggling local schools, but *without any assurance that the new agency will do any better*.
- ❖ Community control is simply swept aside, making the process all stick and no carrot. *The bill relies on punitive measures rather than partnerships with local communities*.
- ❖ There is as yet *no reason to expect that the EAA will be any more successful* with these struggling schools, and the bill does not contemplate the possibility that the EAA might itself “fail.”
- ❖ The bill *continues to assume that schools struggle because of administrative and instructional faults, which can be easily fixed* with new management and clever technology. The evidence indicates that fighting the impact of child poverty is difficult and requires both substantial assistance and extra resources. Community schools are the best vehicles to tackle these problems, with outside help.

“We can’t wait any longer.”

We’re not proposing that we wait. We are proposing constructive action and change in an entirely different direction. Partnership instead of punishment. Support and resources instead of empty demands to “do better” with no change in resources or economic environment.

“Poverty is not an excuse not to try.”

That’s right. But you can’t ignore it either. Where is the evidence that the EAA’s approach to educating children living in poverty will work any better? The experience of Kansas City schools, which lost their state accreditation because they made “no measurable progress,” should give us pause. The experience of the New Orleans Recovery District is far from the unqualified success described in committee hearings. Other communities, however, have made progress – from within their community governed school systems.

Stretch goals (“do better or we will take you over”) do not substitute for a real investment in education. Just because the US Education Department has a narrow vision of school “turnaround” does not mean that Michigan must ignore our schools’ real needs.

The bill assumes that the EAA will be successful. While there are provisions for a school “graduating” from the EAA, there are no provisions for handling a school that fails to improve under EAA control. Instead of calling the EAA into question, such schools are likely to be subjected to an endless round of restructurings and turnarounds – devastating the school, its students, and the local community.

Is this EAA “solution” so promising and certain that it’s worth stripping away community control? Better to implement a solution that can be done *with* the community, rather than *to* it.