



Michigan Parents for Schools

*Parents working for excellent public schools
—for our children, our communities, and our future.*

19 March 2015

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The Honorable Rick Snyder
Governor of Michigan
George W. Romney Building
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Snyder,

I write to you today, on behalf of local public school parents across the state of Michigan, to express our surprise and anger at your most recent executive order (EO 2015-9) transferring responsibility for restructuring troubled schools to an executive department with no claim to expertise in either education or school administration. As parents, we have grown weary of annual budget cuts and ill-informed policies that have continually sapped the strength of our local public schools. Under this executive order, the fate of our schools is not just taken out of the hands of our communities, but decision making power is taken away from the state-wide elected body responsible for public education and the state agency with real expertise in educational matters.

The State School Reform/Redesign Office, until now under the jurisdiction of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education, was created five years ago as part of our state's unsuccessful attempt to win Federal funds in the "Race to the Top" competition. In the rush to apply for badly needed funds, new provisions were added to law which would allow the Michigan Department of Education, through the SRRO, to take over "persistently low achieving" schools which had failed to enact or successfully implement turnaround measures. Even though the SRRO was accountable to the state superintendent, and through him to the elected State Board of Education, many parents and concerned citizens were alarmed at the provisions which would dramatically undercut local control - bypassing the local community, local educators, and local elected officials.

Now, with your executive order, authority over the SRRO would be transferred to the Department of Technology, Management and Budget - an executive department which has absolutely no pertinent expertise or experience in improving public education. Administration of the state's educational data system does not endow DTMB with any ability to manage curriculum, school administration, and classroom structure. At best, they would simply outsource the responsibility, adding another layer of unaccountable bureaucracy between the people of Michigan and their local public schools.

As parent advocates, we have been working to build a different - and better - system to address schools and districts which are struggling academically. Our proposal would still allow the state to intervene in struggling schools where improvement is elusive, but would do so by providing expert diagnosis and a legally mandated process in which local stakeholders would hammer out a plan of action that addresses the identified needs. (You

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can find an outline of our proposal here: mipfs.org/node/206) A version of our proposal was introduced as legislation last session, and we hope to build support for it again this session.

In contrast, placing DTMB in charge of school restructuring lays bare the faulty notion that the only thing wrong with struggling schools is poor management. This idea was also behind the creation of the Education Achievement Authority, which even its current Chancellor admits was unable to make real improvements in its first three years of operation.

Gov. Snyder, we urge you to reconsider this unwise, and legally questionable, measure. We need real, productive, solutions for our schools - not more bureaucracy. Instead of state takeover, we need to involve and engage our communities in the critical effort to make sure our local public schools offer a quality education to every child.

Respectfully,



Steven Norton, Executive Director, on behalf of the Michigan Parents for Schools Board of Directors

We are joined in this statement by the following organizations and individual advocates:

Ann Arbor PTO Council Advocacy Committee
East Grand Rapids Public Schools Legislative Committee
Forest Hills Families Supporting Our Schools
Friends of Dexter Community Schools
Friends of Kent County Schools
Okemos Parents for Schools
Parents for Thornapple-Kellogg Schools
Save Michigan's Public Schools

Stephanie Keiles, Ann Arbor PS Parent, and co-founder Michigan Friends of Public Education
Elizabeth Stieg, Bloomfield Hills Schools Parent, and BHS PTOC Legislative Chair
Karen Twomey, Ferndale Public Schools Parent, and Trustee, Ferndale Board of Education