




STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 30, 2020
TO: House and Senate K-12 Appropriations Subcommittees
FROM: Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., State Superintendent 
SUBJECT: Quarterly Report to the Legislature on Deficit Districts

OVERVIEW

Pursuant to language in Section 1220(2)(a) of the revised school code (MCL 380.1220), the Michigan Department of Education is required to report quarterly to the legislature on school districts incurring year-end deficits and the progress in reducing those deficits. In this first quarterly report for fiscal year (FY) 2020-21, an analysis of FY 2019-20 audited financial data has been completed for all school districts that submitted information as of December 9, 2020 (see **Note** below). The analysis is conducted using data collected from audited financial statements and the financial information database (FID).

Note: This report was prepared with data as of December 9, 2020. Projected financial data has been used for Flint Community Schools, Hazel Park City School District, South Lake Schools, and Highland Park City Schools.

Section 1220(2)(a) of the revised school code (PA 451 of 1976, as amended) states:

"(2) Not later than March 1 of each year, the department shall prepare a report of deficits incurred or projected by school districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies in the immediately preceding fiscal year and the progress made in reducing those deficits and submit the report to the standing committees of the legislature responsible for K-12 education legislation, the appropriations subcommittees of the legislature responsible for K-12 school aid appropriations, the house and senate fiscal agencies, the state treasurer, and the state budget director. The department also shall submit quarterly interim reports concerning the progress made by school districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies in reducing those deficits to the standing committees of the legislature responsible for K-12 education legislation, the appropriations subcommittees of the legislature responsible for K-12 school aid appropriations, the house and senate fiscal agencies, the state treasurer, and the state budget director. On a quarterly basis, the

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superintendent of public instruction shall publicly present those reports to the appropriations subcommittees of the legislature responsible for K-12 school aid appropriations."

The following narrative provides relevant information regarding the deficit district process and requirements. The attached analysis provides specific information about deficit districts.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PROCESS

Section 1220 of the revised school code requires traditional school districts, intermediate school districts, and public school academies with a deficit fund balance to submit a deficit elimination plan (DEP) to the department. We have a formal process in place to ensure that districts develop and implement DEPs to eliminate their deficits. This process may include requiring district representatives (e.g., administrators, local board of education members, union leaders) to attend a meeting in Lansing to discuss requirements in the law, status of the district's financial situation, possible modifications to the district's DEP, and to answer questions.

The purpose of these meetings is to ensure the district's key representatives understand what their responsibilities are under current law. The department stresses that because Michigan is a locally controlled state, district officials must make the difficult decisions that will eliminate the deficit. The department invites other state agencies to participate, as necessary.

Department staff work closely with the school review and fiscal accountability division within the Michigan Department of Treasury. Our collaborative efforts ensure districts get the support they need to improve their financial condition.

REQUIREMENTS IN LAW

DISTRICT REQUIREMENTS

Sec. 1220(1) of the revised school code [MCL 380.1220(1)] states:

"A school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy shall not adopt or operate under a deficit budget, and a school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy shall not incur an operating deficit in a fund during a school fiscal year. If a school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy has an existing deficit fund balance, incurs a deficit fund balance in the most recently completed school fiscal year, or adopts a current year budget that projects a deficit fund balance, all of the following apply:

(a) The school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy shall notify the superintendent of public instruction and the state treasurer immediately upon the occurrence of the circumstance. A school district shall provide a copy of the notice under this subdivision to the intermediate superintendent of the intermediate school district in which the school district is located. A public school academy shall provide a copy of the notice under this subdivision to the authorizing body of the public school academy.

(b) Within 30 days after making notification under subdivision (a), the school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy shall submit to the superintendent of public instruction in the form and manner prescribed by the department an amended budget for the current school fiscal year and a deficit elimination plan approved by the board of the school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy, with a copy to the state treasurer. A school district shall transmit a copy of the amended budget and the deficit elimination plan to the intermediate superintendent of the intermediate school district in which the school district is located. A public school academy shall transmit a copy of the amended budget and the deficit elimination plan to its authorizing body.

(c) The department may withhold and release some or all of the money payable to the school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy as provided under section 102(1) of the state school aid act of 1979, MCL 388.1702.

(d) The superintendent of public instruction may require a deficit elimination plan to include an academic plan for the school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy.

(e) After the superintendent of public instruction approves a school district's, intermediate school district's, or public school academy's deficit elimination plan, the school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy shall post the deficit elimination plan on the school district's, intermediate school district's, or public school academy's website."

The Uniform Budgeting and Accounting Act places the burden for eliminating a district's deficit on the local board of education.

- *MCL 141.436(7) – "Except as otherwise permitted by Section 102 of the State School Aid Act, 1979 PA 94, MCL 388.1702, or by other law, the legislative body shall not adopt a general appropriations act or an amendment to that act which causes estimated total expenditures, including an accrued deficit, to exceed total estimated revenues, including an available surplus and the proceeds from bonds or other obligations issued under the Fiscal Stabilization Act, 1981 PA 80, MCL 141.1001 to 141.1011, or the balance of the principal of these bonds or other obligations."*
- *MCL 141.437(2) – "If, during a fiscal year, it appears to the chief administrative officer or to the legislative body that the actual and probable revenues from taxes and other sources in a fund are less than the estimated revenues, including an available surplus upon which appropriations from the fund were based and the proceeds from bonds or other obligations issued under the Fiscal Stabilization Act, 1981 PA 80, MCL 141.1001 to 141.1011, or the balance of the principal of these bonds or other obligations, the chief administrative officer or fiscal officer shall present to the legislative body recommendations which, if adopted, would prevent expenditures from exceeding available revenues for that current fiscal year. The recommendations shall include proposals for reducing appropriations from the*

fund for budgetary centers in a manner that would cause the total of appropriations to not be greater than the total of revised estimated revenues of the fund, or proposals for measures necessary to provide revenues sufficient to meet expenditures of the fund, or both. The recommendations shall recognize the requirements of state law and the provisions of collective bargaining agreements."

- *MCL 141.438(3) – "Except as otherwise provided in Section 19, an administrative officer of the local unit shall not incur expenditures against an appropriation account in excess of the amount appropriated by the legislative body. The chief administrative officer, an administrative officer, or an employee of the local unit shall not apply or divert money of the local unit for purposes inconsistent with those specified in the appropriations of the legislative body."*

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

Penalties in law that may be imposed on deficit districts: (1) withholding state school aid [MCL 388.1702(1)]; and (2) reporting a violation to the Michigan Attorney General who will review the report and determine if action is required [MCL 388.1761].

1. *MCL 388.1702(1) – "If a district or intermediate district is required to submit a deficit elimination plan under section 1220 of the revised school code, MCL 380.1220, and the district or intermediate district fails to submit a deficit elimination plan or the deficit elimination plan is not approved, the department may withhold some or all of the money payable to the district or intermediate district under this article, in an amount the department determines necessary to incentivize the district or intermediate district to eliminate the deficit, until the district or intermediate district submits to the department for approval an amended budget for the current school fiscal year and a deficit elimination plan in the form and manner prescribed by the department or until the deficit elimination plan is approved by the department, as determined by the department."*
2. *MCL 388.1761 – "A school official or member of a board or other person who neglects or refuses to do or perform an act required by this act or who violates or knowingly permits or consents to the violation of this act is guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by imprisonment for not more than 90 days, or a fine of not more than \$1,500, or both."*

As state superintendent, I have not asked for the Attorney General's involvement regarding deficit districts.

DEFICIT DISTRICTS UNDER DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY OVERSIGHT

The Michigan Department of Treasury has oversight of districts experiencing rapidly deteriorating financial circumstances and districts that have been in deficit for more than five years. Of the 17 districts that were in deficit as of June 30, 2020, eight are under Treasury's oversight:

- Bay City Academy
- Benton Harbor Area Schools
- Detroit Public Safety Academy
- Highland Park City Schools
- Pinckney Community Schools
- Pontiac City School District
- South Lake Schools
- Vanderbilt Area Schools

DEFICIT DISTRICT DATA

Attachments A and B provide the financial analysis for FY 2019-20.

Questions about this report should be directed to Phil Boone, in MDE's office of financial management, at BooneP2@michigan.gov or 517-335-4059.

Attachments

**DEFICIT DISTRICT QUARTERLY REPORT
TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE K-12 APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEES**

**FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF DEFICIT DISTRICTS
2019-20**

An analysis of the audited FY 2019-20 financial data has been completed for those districts that ended FY 2018-19 with a deficit. The analysis is conducted using data collected from audited financial statements and the financial information database (FID).

There were 15 districts that ended FY 2019 in deficit:

- 6 districts eliminated their deficit in FY 2020
 - Attachment B, Category 1
- 5 districts reduced their deficit in FY 2020
 - Attachment B, Category 2
- 3 districts increased their deficit in FY 2020
 - Attachment B, Category 3
- 1 district is eliminating its deficit with school operating taxes
 - Attachment B, Category 5

Akron-Fairgrove Schools, Ann Arbor Learning Community, Detroit Community Schools (PSA), Francis Street Primary School, Fulton Schools, Houghton Lake Community Schools, Lake Linden-Hubbell School District, and Woodley Leadership Academy began FY 2020 with a positive fund balance, but ended the year in deficit (Attachment B, Category 4).

Highland Park City Schools (Attachment B, Category 5) is eliminating its deficit through the capture of school operating taxes. Highland Park City Schools was converted to a public school academy in FY 2013.

CATEGORY 1

Schools eliminating their deficit as of June 30, 2020

School Name	June 2018 Fund Balance	June 2019 Fund Balance	June 2020 Fund Balance	2020 GF Revenues	% Fund Balance is of Revenues
Beecher Community School District	(672,189)	(106,085)	649,334	10,966,917	5.92%
Charlevoix Montessori Academy for the Arts	62,326	(51,224)	35,329	491,925	7.18%
Flint Community Schools	1,035,472	(3,349,028)	11,856,105	65,761,333	18.03%
Hazel Park City School District	(4,148,964)	(606,375)	1,615,439	35,778,607	4.52%
Livingston Classical Academy	158,752	(49,308)	122,845	1,961,753	6.26%
Suttons Bay Public Schools	(347,386)	(138,803)	183,318	7,184,167	2.55%

CATEGORY 2

Schools starting FY 2020 in deficit that ended the year with a reduced deficit

School Name	June 2018 Fund Balance	June 2019 Fund Balance	June 2020 Fund Balance	2020 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Bay City Academy	(1,165,058)	(986,750)	(811,258)	3,593,205	-22.58%
Benton Harbor Area Schools	(4,425,383)	(3,744,778)	(1,215,316)	25,134,433	-4.84%
Macomb Academy	(1,480,571)	(1,441,642)	(1,430,124)	1,120,240	-127.66%
Pontiac City School District	(6,684,485)	(5,318,106)	(1,900,416)	59,412,961	-3.20%
Vanderbilt Area Schools	(92,145)	(90,632)	(39,146)	1,355,675	-2.89%

CATEGORY 3

Schools starting FY 2020 in deficit that ended the year with a greater deficit

School Name	June 2018 Fund Balance	June 2019 Fund Balance	June 2020 Fund Balance	2020 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Detroit Public Safety Academy	(543,862)	(481,461)	(510,317)	2,620,522	-19.47%
Pinckney Community Schools	(166,387)	(711,696)	(1,967,697)	25,616,838	-7.68%
South Lake Schools	(1,261,820)	(1,660,912)	(2,319,328)	18,858,322	-12.30%

CATEGORY 4

Schools starting FY 2020 with a positive fund balance that ended the year in deficit

School Name	June 2018 Fund Balance	June 2019 Fund Balance	June 2020 Fund Balance	2020 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Akron-Fairgrove Schools	170,279	115,370	(25,432)	3,893,565	-0.65%
Ann Arbor Learning Community	61,941	50,509	(60,148)	2,631,487	-2.29%
Detroit Community Schools	347,929	120,303	(509,508)	6,663,759	-7.65%
Francis Street Primary School	(42,008)	44,509	(20,962)	451,087	-4.65%
Fulton Schools	1,230,925	595,651	(189,971)	7,145,234	-2.66%

Houghton Lake Community Schools	864,798	365,914	(310,263)	14,564,691	-2.13%
Lake Linden-Hubbell School District	99,706	14,783	(8,190)	4,151,579	-0.20%
Woodley Leadership Academy	-	-	(211,126)	1,490,370	-14.17%

CATEGORY 5

School eliminating its deficit with the capture of school operating taxes through the Department of Treasury

School Name	June 2018 Fund Balance	June 2019 Fund Balance	June 2020 Fund Balance	2020 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Highland Park City Schools	(6,395,411)	(5,497,559)	(4,312,247)	1,814,869	-238%