



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING

RICK SNYDER  
GOVERNOR

BRIAN J. WHISTON  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** September 16, 2015  
**TO:** House and Senate K-12 Appropriations Subcommittees  
**FROM:** Brian Whiston, State Superintendent  
**SUBJECT:** Quarterly Report to the Legislature on Deficit Districts

**OVERVIEW**

Pursuant to language in Section 1220(2)(a) of the of the Revised School Code (MCL 380.1220), the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is required to report quarterly to the Legislature on school districts incurring year-end deficits and the districts' progress in reducing those deficits. In this fourth quarterly report for FY 2014-2015, an analysis of the unaudited FY 2014-2015 financial data has been completed for those school districts that ended FY 2013-14 with a deficit. The statutory due date for the FY 2014-15 data is November 1, 2015. The analysis is conducted using data collected from Deficit Elimination Plans (DEPs) and required monthly budget control reports. It should be noted that since 1976, MDE has provided the Legislature with an annual report on local school districts in financial deficit.

**Note: This report was prepared with data as of September 2, 2015.**

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 superintendent of public instruction shall publicly present those reports to the*

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*appropriations subcommittees of the legislature responsible for K-12 school aid appropriations.”*

The following narrative provides relevant information regarding process, requirements, and selected district information; the attached analysis provides deficit district specific information.

### **MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MDE) PROCESS**

Under Governor Snyder’s Good Government initiative, MDE has included a financial metric on our Scorecard related to DEPs as follows: “Percent of DEPs reviewed within 30 days of receipt from districts.” MDE is continuing to achieve 100% on this metric.

In addition, the law requires that deficit districts submit a DEP to MDE. MDE has a formal process in place to ensure that school districts develop and implement DEPs to eliminate their general fund deficits. Long-standing MDE procedures ensure that districts are treated fairly throughout the deficit elimination process. MDE’s website ([http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530\\_6605-106599--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530_6605-106599--,00.html)) includes definitions, contact information, a flow chart to ensure accurate completion of required forms, and district requirements related to districts in deficit. MDE provides considerable technical assistance to districts during the DEP development and submission process. When necessary, the process may include requiring district representatives (i.e. administrators, local board of education members, and union representatives) to attend a meeting(s) in Lansing to discuss requirements in the law (see following section), status of the district’s financial situation, possible modifications to the district’s DEP, and answer questions. The desired outcome of such a meeting is for all of the district’s key representatives to leave with a mutual understanding related to what is in the law and what is required of deficit districts. The MDE team stresses that because Michigan is a locally controlled state, district officials must make the difficult decisions that will eliminate the deficit. MDE also includes Department of Treasury (Treasury) staff in these meetings to discuss how processes within Treasury regarding the State Aid Note Borrowing Program and the Emergency Loan Program relate to and affect a district’s deficit status. It is imperative that district representatives understand that borrowing through Treasury for cash flow purposes does not negate the need to reduce expenditures in order to eliminate the deficit. As we continue to work with these critical districts, it became apparent that the districts also need to have a conversation with Office of Retirement Systems if there is an issue with MPSERS payments and with the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs should the district have reimbursement issues related to Unemployment Insurance. Both agencies are invited to these meetings as necessary.

Public school academies (charter schools) are treated the same as traditional districts when faced with a deficit situation. They receive technical assistance and must submit a DEP to MDE and have it approved.

Since our last report to you on June 3, 2015, MDE staff has met in Lansing with the following districts:

### **Ferndale Schools – 6/22/2015**

- Representatives from Ferndale Schools met with MDE staff to discuss the district's deteriorating fund balance. Subsequent to the meeting, Ferndale was able to adopt a 2015-16 budget that ended with a positive fund balance.

### **Pinckney – 7/21/2015**

- The Department met with Pinckney on July 21, 2015, at their request. They informed us of ongoing negotiations with employee groups and asked for an extension to their July 31 DEP submission deadline, which was granted. A revised DEP was submitted on August 21, 2015 and is under review by the Department.

## **REQUIREMENTS IN LAW**

### **DISTRICT REQUIREMENTS**

Michigan is a locally controlled state; 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 are to be imposed on deficit districts: (1) withholding state school aid [MCL 388.1702(1)] (see statutory language below); and (2) reporting a violation to the Attorney General who will review the report and determine whether or not to act [MCL 388.1761] (see statutory language below).

*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."*

To date, the prior State Superintendent has periodically authorized state aid to be withheld from a limited number of deficit districts that have failed to submit timely, required information.

*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."* There has been no instance where, as State Superintendent, I have asked the Attorney General's involvement regarding deficit districts.

### **DEFICIT ELIMINATION PLANS NOT REQUESTED**

Four districts'/academies' deficit fund balances at the end of the 2013-14 fiscal year were caused by timing issues with how grant related revenues and expenditures were recognized. Because reimbursements for expenditures recorded in 2013-14 were not received within 60 days of the last day of the fiscal year, the corresponding revenue had to be recorded in 2014-15. Since the deficit was directly related to this generally accepted accounting principle, and the districts' budgets show positive fund balances at the end of 2014-15, the Department did not request DEPs for the following districts and academies:

- Lakeside Charter School
- Akron Fairgrove Schools
- Blanche Kelso Bruce Academy
- Education Achievement Authority of Michigan

The Department remains concerned with the financial health of these districts and academies, knowing a simple timing issue could cause a deficit situation. We urged the districts and academies to review their current budgets and implement any necessary changes that will lead to stronger and more stable fund balances.

### **EARLY WARNING LEGISLATION**

Legislation to address districts and PSAs that trigger "early warning" indicators of financial stress was signed by Governor Snyder on June 17, 2015. The legislation is intended to allow school districts to receive assistance from their Intermediate School District and the Department of Treasury prior to facing a financial emergency.

The legislation expands the role of the Department of Treasury including oversight of districts that have been in deficit, or project to be in deficit, for more than five years. Those districts will be required to submit an Enhanced Deficit Elimination plan (EDEP) to Treasury. Of the 38 districts that have projected to be in deficit at June 30, 2015, 16 would fall under Treasury's oversight. Our interpretation of the legislation indicates that the following districts would transition to Treasury under this legislation:

- Benton Harbor Area Schools
- Bridgeport Spaulding Community School District
- Clintondale Community Schools
- Detroit City School District
- Flint Community Schools
- Hazel Park City School District
- Highland Park City Schools
- Lincoln Consolidated Schools
- Mackinaw City Public Schools
- Mt. Clemens Community School District
- Muskegon Heights School District
- New Haven Community Schools
- Pontiac City School District
- Southgate Community School District
- Vanderbilt Area Schools
- Westwood Community Schools

At the Treasury Department's request the transition of oversight of those districts from MDE to Treasury will happen closer to January 1, 2016.

### **DEFICIT DISTRICT DATA**

Attachments A and B provide the financial analysis for FY 2014-15.

Additional questions about this report should be directed to Dan Hanrahan, Office of State Aid and School Finance, at [HanrahanD@michigan.gov](mailto:HanrahanD@michigan.gov) or (517) 373-3350.

Attachments

**DEFICIT DISTRICT QUARTERLY REPORT  
TO THE HOUSE AND SENATE K-12 APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEES  
  
FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF MICHIGAN DEFICIT SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
PROJECTED 2014-2015**

An analysis of the projected fiscal year 2014-2015 (FY2015) financial data has been completed for those districts that ended fiscal year 2014 (FY2014) with a deficit. The analysis is conducted using data collected from Deficit Elimination Plans (DEPs) and required monthly budget control reports.

Fifty-eight (58) districts and public school academies ended FY2014 in a deficit position. Two were public school academies which closed at the end of FY2014. Attachment B lists the remaining 56 districts and public school academies that ended FY2014 in a deficit position. Fifty-two (52) districts and public school academies ended FY2013 in a deficit position.

Of the 56 operating districts that ended FY2014 in deficit (including the four listed on page 5), Twenty (20) project to have successfully eliminated their deficit at June 30, 2015 (Attachment B, Category 1). Twenty (20) project to have reduced their deficit in FY2015 (Attachment B, Category 2). Fourteen (14) project to have increased their deficit in FY2015 (Attachment B, Category 3). Two (2) districts that ended FY2014 in deficit were converted to public school academy systems in FY2013. The predecessor local districts' deficits are being eliminated through the capture of school operating taxes (Attachment B, Category 5).

Two (2) districts that began FY2015 with a positive fund balance project to have ended the year with a deficit fund balance (Attachment B, Category 4). That number may change as the year progresses and the districts submit their annual financial data on November 1, 2015.

Attachment B also includes fund balance information for June 30, 2013 and June 30, 2014.

NOTE: The 2014-15 data in this report are projections from the districts and are subject to change as their audits are completed.

## CATEGORY 1 – Districts that project to eliminate their deficit at June 30, 2015.

ISD/School Name	June 2013 Fund Balance	June 2014 Fund Balance	Projected June 2015 Fund Balance	Projected 2015 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Akron Fairgrove Schools <sup>A</sup>	\$235,003	(\$39,679)	\$64,581	\$2,973,419	2.17%
Ashley Community Schools	(\$225,307)	(\$90,081)	\$121,941	\$2,666,201	4.57%
Blanche Kelso Bruce Academy <sup>A</sup>	\$326,628	(\$502,085)	\$60,904	\$8,037,904	0.76%
Branch Line School	NA	(\$22,024)	\$30,965	\$730,357	4.24%
Brighton Area Schools	(\$8,500,481)	(\$4,322,572)	\$1,425,487	\$60,549,832	2.35%
East Detroit Public Schools	(\$5,002,724)	(\$1,294,923)	\$197,374	\$35,531,041	0.56%
Ecorse Public School District	(\$1,809,903)	(\$661,837)	\$411,122	\$14,733,383	2.79%
Education Achievement Authority of Michigan <sup>A</sup>	\$6,781,147	(\$472,258)	\$128,757	\$98,871,715	0.13%
Essexville-Hampton Public Schools	\$266,067	(\$63,027)	\$7,895	\$14,696,475	0.05%
Grand Traverse Academy	\$960,009	(\$365,129)	\$168,714	\$9,417,253	1.79%
Hamtramck Public Schools	(\$3,443,659)	(\$1,079,978)	\$1,363,637	\$32,373,017	4.21%
Hancock Public Schools	(\$514,291)	(\$5,856)	\$171,070	\$7,008,864	2.44%
Lakeside Charter School <sup>A</sup>	NA	(\$233,952)	\$111,389	\$1,411,341	7.89%
Life Tech Academy	NA	(\$58,751)	\$145,710	\$960,667	15.17%
Madison-Carver Academy	(\$402,226)	(\$261,020)	\$1,939	\$3,878,622	0.05%
Saginaw City School District	(\$6,157,077)	(\$4,163,177)	\$1,681,116	\$56,052,195	3.00%
Southwest Detroit Lighthouse Charter Academy	NA	(\$145,344)	\$12,226	\$3,407,493	0.36%
Suttons Bay Public Schools	\$131,076	(\$351,517)	\$95,792	\$7,437,082	1.29%
Taylor School District	(\$8,834,147)	(\$3,871,072)	\$238,254	\$68,047,160	0.35%
White Cloud School District	(\$580,276)	(\$113,644)	\$420,409	\$9,002,340	4.67%



CATEGORY 2 – Districts that began FY2015 in deficit and project to end the year with a reduced deficit.

ISD/School Name	June 2013 Fund Balance	June 2014 Fund Balance	Projected June 2015 Fund Balance	Projected 2015 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Alpena Public Schools	(\$863,359)	(\$1,574,627)	(\$802,791)	\$36,195,304	-2.22%
Bangor Public Schools	(\$373,350)	(\$452,425)	(\$349,309)	\$12,296,549	-2.84%
Battle Creek Montessori Academy	NA	(\$251,219)	(\$162,621)	\$1,482,449	-10.97%
Beecher Community School District	(\$701,015)	(\$988,531)	(\$973,518)	\$14,036,260	-6.94%
Bridgeport Spaulding Community School District	(\$3,221,274)	(\$2,924,401)	(\$1,505,257)	\$16,076,340	-9.36%
Clintondale Community Schools	(\$3,405,650)	(\$2,161,441)	(\$1,561,687)	\$27,190,801	-5.74%
Dearborn Heights School District #7	(\$1,769,214)	(\$1,641,961)	(\$315,243)	\$23,630,999	-1.33%
Flint Community Schools <sup>D</sup>	(\$10,403,722)	(\$21,964,181)	(\$16,484,755)	\$85,340,173	-19.32%
Highland Park Public School Academy	(\$620,248)	(\$409,544)	(\$82,301)	\$5,449,365	-1.51%
Macomb Montessori Academy	NA	(\$213,139)	(\$187,251)	\$1,820,021	-10.29%
Mt. Clemens Community Schools	(\$3,586,719)	(\$2,442,338)	(\$2,054,056)	\$13,531,882	-15.18%
Muskegon Heights Public School Academy	(\$553,763)	(\$665,605)	(\$436,774)	\$10,252,224	-4.26%
Muskegon Montessori Academy for Environmental Change	NA	(\$307,246)	(\$220,728)	\$1,311,763	-16.83%
North Adams-Jerome Public Schools	\$30,421	(\$108,857)	(\$47,065)	\$3,115,544	-1.51%
Perry Public Schools	(\$1,689,022)	(\$1,578,822)	(\$528,468)	\$11,782,409	-4.49%
Pinckney Community Schools	(\$1,847,424)	(\$1,915,772)	(\$1,915,357)	\$30,122,785	-6.36%
Pontiac School District <sup>B,C</sup>	(\$51,677,552)	(\$39,077,646)	(\$35,935,748)	\$88,677,800	-40.52%
Southgate Community Schools	(\$4,906,716)	(\$3,982,984)	(\$1,478,008)	\$41,775,336	-3.54%
Vanderbilt Area School District	(\$221,573)	(\$195,214)	(\$126,248)	\$1,379,022	-9.15%
Westwood Community School District	(\$6,311,270)	(\$4,977,195)	(\$4,061,435)	\$25,720,054	-15.79%

CATEGORY 3 – Districts that began FY2015 in deficit and project to end the year with an increased deficit.

ISD/School Name	June 2013 Fund Balance	June 2014 Fund Balance	Projected June 2015 Fund Balance	Projected 2015 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Albion Public Schools	(\$149,003)	(\$714,425)	(\$847,843)	\$7,206,929	-11.76%
Benton Harbor Area Schools <sup>B,C</sup>	(\$15,517,748)	(\$15,145,607)	(\$16,393,045)	\$35,469,558	-46.22%
Camden Frontier Schools	\$184,226	(\$55,243)	(\$99,201)	\$4,593,017	-2.16%
Cheboygan Area Schools	\$976,845	(\$232,119)	(\$382,004)	\$17,162,161	-2.23%
Detroit Public Safety Academy	NA	(\$537,993)	(\$740,161)	\$1,457,056	-50.80%
Detroit Public Schools	(\$93,881,926)	(\$169,460,308)	(\$238,239,008)	\$647,633,250	-36.79%
Garden City School District	\$1,235,399	(\$606,713)	(\$3,920,595)	\$48,431,769	-8.10%
Iron Mountain Public Schools	\$247,143	(\$224,664)	(\$617,201)	\$7,389,703	-8.35%
Lincoln Consolidated Schools	(\$679,918)	(\$1,372,785)	(\$1,619,344)	\$44,563,593	-3.63%
Mackinaw City Public Schools	(\$345,160)	(\$515,500)	(\$586,198)	\$2,216,697	-26.44%
New Haven Community Schools	(\$236,549)	(\$167,869)	(\$295,962)	\$12,636,928	-2.34%
School District of the City of Hazel Park	(\$3,919,402)	(\$6,191,945)	(\$11,575,197)	\$40,710,454	-28.43%
South Lake Schools	\$689,515	(\$229,386)	(\$1,114,002)	\$20,486,720	-5.44%
Warren Consolidated Schools	\$6,224,809	(\$2,167,334)	(\$5,053,331)	\$164,938,000	-3.06%

CATEGORY 4 – Districts that began FY2015 with a positive fund balance but project to end the year in deficit.

ISD/School Name	June 2013 Fund Balance	June 2014 Fund Balance	Projected June 2015 Fund Balance	Projected 2015 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Gibraltar School District	\$3,306,430	\$1,365,711	(\$590,840)	\$33,194,035	-1.78%
Tahquamenon Area Schools	\$43,482	\$9,975	(\$121,847)	\$6,633,782	-1.84%

CATEGORY 5 – Districts whose deficits are being eliminated through the capture of school operating taxes through Department of Treasury.

ISD/School Name	June 2013 Fund Balance	June 2014 Fund Balance	Projected June 2015 Fund Balance	Projected 2015 GF Revenues	% Deficit is of Revenues
Highland Park City Schools <sup>B,E</sup>	(\$7,638,145)	TBD	TBD	TBD	
Muskegon Heights School District <sup>B,E</sup>	(\$1,117,702)	(\$1,089,576)	(\$868,007)	\$1,506,677	-57.61%

#### SUMMARY:

No. of Districts	Cat.	Description
20	1	Districts that project to eliminate their deficit at June 30, 2015
20	2	Districts that began FY2015 in deficit and project to end the year with a reduced deficit.
14	3	Districts that began FY2015 in deficit and project to end the year with a greater deficit.
2	4	Districts that began FY2015 with a positive fund balance but project to end the year in deficit.
2	5	Districts whose deficits are being eliminated through the capture of school operating taxes through Department of Treasury

#### NOTES:

A	DEP not requested due to timing issues related to generally accepted accounting principles.
B	District has an emergency loan from Treasury.
C	Financial emergency declared under PA436.
D	A note in the district's audited financial statements indicates that the district may owe Genesee ISD up to \$8.6 million that is not recognized in the deficit.
E	District exists as authorizer of an academy.