



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

January 10, 2024

Dear Michigan Legislators:

With the new year comes a fresh opportunity to make an even more significant impact on the lives of Michigan's children and educators.

From our [letter](#) to the legislature last year, we worked closely with you to accomplish several priority items, including repeal of the state's A-F accountability system; repeal of the Read by Grade Three retention requirement; improvement to the state's educator evaluation laws; teacher and counselor reciprocity; the ability of retired educators to help out in schools; and commonsense gun laws. Additionally, funding was increased to address goals in [Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#), specifically addressing the teacher shortage (Goal 7 of the Top 10 Strategic Education Plan); improving the health, safety and wellness of students and staff (Goal 3); improving early literacy (Goal 2); expanding early childhood programs (Goal 1); and ensuring more adequate and equitable school funding (Goal 8).

Included in this letter are additional legislative efforts that would help continue progress toward Michigan becoming a Top 10 education state.

- **Continued efforts to improve the adequacy and equity of school funding.** The FY23 and FY24 budgets were the strongest back-to-back education budgets in Michigan's post-Prop A (1994) history. That said, we must continue to improve the adequacy and equity of school funding, which affects our ability to recruit and retain strong educators and support staff in districts across the state. At the same time, we need to reduce the number of categorical grants so that we don't inadvertently disincentivize smaller districts with limited staff from applying for needed state funds. (Goals 7 and 8 of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan)
- **Mandatory Mentoring/Training for Administrators, Superintendents and Local School Board Members.** We know that a leading cause of educator turnover at all levels is a relative lack of mentoring. For years, the only mandatory mentoring in the state was for new teachers, and it was unfunded at the state level. There was no mandatory mentoring of new principals and new superintendents, and no mandatory training of new school board members.

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The FY 2024 budget provided \$50 million over five years for the mentoring of new teachers, counselors, and administrators, as well as \$150,000 for the training of new school board members. The educator evaluation law passed in late 2023 included mandatory new principal mentoring. To this improvement, the legislature needs to add mandatory new superintendent mentoring and new school board member training. Mentoring of educators in new roles must be structured and strengthened so that educators are more likely to continue in the profession, to the benefit of children. (Goal 7 of the Top 10 Strategic Education Plan)

- **Expansion of Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities.** More than 108,000 students, approximately 24 percent of the state's public high school students, took at least one CTE class in 2022-23. More than 48,000 students were CTE completers, students who finished an entire CTE program course of study.

That said, with support from the state legislature, we can do better. With career awareness, exploration, and development, we need to engage elementary, middle, and high school students, respectively, and, in so doing, increase interest in not simply particular careers but the relevance of education in preparing students for these careers. In Michigan, students' opportunities to enter the health care field, participate in skilled trades training, participate in CTE in their home district, or travel an hour to a training center all depend on the region in which they live. We can do better for children in intermediate school districts (ISDs) that are not capable of supporting a CTE millage and by expanding funding to increase opportunities in areas where millages aren't sufficient to support robust CTE experiences. Expansion of CTE opportunities will require both state budgetary and state policy changes with goals of growing Michigan's work force and retaining in Michigan more of our young people. (Goals 4, 5, and 6 of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan)

- **More Instructional Time for Students.** Since 2019, state law has permitted the erosion of student in-person instructional time. Post-pandemic, it has become increasingly clear that student in-person instructional time is valuable, particularly for our youngest students, and supported in the research over remote instruction. We need to address and reverse this erosion of student in-person instructional time, in support of student achievement. (Goals 2, 4, and 5 of Top 10 Michigan's Strategic Education Plan)
- **Science of Reading/Dyslexia screening and support.** Screening for the characteristics of dyslexia, as well as the professional development of teachers of reading and teacher candidates in the science of reading, will

help improve literacy in Michigan and by extension other educational outcomes as well. We need Senate Bills 567-568 to be enacted, as well as financial support for this effort. (Goals 2 and 5 of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan)

- **Children's Mental Health Funding.** This funding has increased substantially, from no funding in the state school aid act in FY18 to more than \$400 million in FY24. That said, Section 31aa, at \$328 million the most significant portion of these funds, is designated as nonrecurring and needs to be made recurring. Children's mental health was a prominent mention in the Michigan Parents' Council [report](#) and has long been recognized as a critical area for attention by educators. (Goal 3 of Top 10 Michigan's Strategic Education Plan)
- **Expanding the Michigan School Meals Program.** Although there was a significant investment in providing for so-called universal school meals in the FY24 budget, universal school meals need to be codified in state law to guarantee the requirement, as proposed in Senate Bill 500. Not all children in non-federally funded preschool programs in public schools consistently have access to the Michigan school meal program and should. (Goal 3 of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan)
- **Safety protocols and teacher certification.** Updates to Section 1535a of the Revised School Code would allow MDE to better ensure student safety by expanding the types of offenses that would be subject to suspension or revocation of an educator credential. The legislature needs to update this statute to account for the changing landscape in technology and offender behavior. This is especially the case given the existence of predatory online behaviors, and the increase in student participation in virtual learning options. Additionally, as prosecutors work to secure convictions, many offenses that would have been covered under current law are pled down to lesser offenses that do not allow for suspension or revocation of an educator credential even when these offenses involve minors or grooming behavior, or when they occur on school property.
- **Foster Care/Congregate Care Graduation Protections.** Students currently living in congregate foster care settings are guaranteed an education through the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), responsible for the support and education of these young people. However, there is nothing in state law that requires the education provided by the congregate care facility to meet the statutory Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements. As a result, time spent learning in some circumstances does not lead to progress toward a high school diploma. This and other barriers to progress for our youth in foster care

must be addressed in the state legislature. The Michigan State Board of Education passed a [resolution](#) to this point in December 2022. Already approved by the House, House Bills 4676-4678 must be passed by the Senate and signed into law as quickly as possible. (Goal 5 of Top 10 Michigan's Strategic Education Plan)

- **Enrolling every Michigan child.** Currently, Michigan enrolls students in traditional public school districts and public school academies (PSAs). In recent years, our understanding of private and parochial school student enrollments has grown, depending on the interaction of private and parochial schools with particular state-funded programs. For the safety of ALL students, it is important to enroll students in the following four "buckets:"
  - public schools (including charter schools)
  - private schools
  - parochial schools
  - home schools

Having a record of all children enrolled in these four buckets would provide an understanding of the children not currently enrolled in any learning environment. The issue of "missing children" is a national problem with potential negative consequences for too many children.

Parents should be able to choose the best educational system for their children. However, there is a history in Michigan and across the nation of some children not receiving any education at all, in particularly egregious cases in abusive or neglected environments. Knowing where all children are enrolled in an educational setting is an issue of student safety, neither more nor less. (Goals 2, 3, and 5 of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan)

- **Special education alternative route to certification.** Currently, Michigan offers an alternative route to special education teacher certification. This alternative route is in state statute that sunsets July 21, 2024. The legislature needs to prioritize passage of Senate Bill 518 to allow this alternative route to continue for at least another three years to generate growth in the pipeline of special education teachers in this time of shortage. (Goal 7 of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan)
- **Charter School Financial Transparency.** Public school academies (PSAs), or charter schools as they are often referred, have many of the same requirements as traditional public school districts. However, this is not the case with respect to financial transparency. We support financial transparency for charter schools that permits the same understanding about charter school spending as that for traditional public school district

spending, consistent with the State Board of Education's December 2022 [resolution](#).

- **MPSERS and MDE.** MDE is a small state department, with 1 percent of the state government workforce but responsible for the distribution and oversight of more than 20 percent of the state's revenue. MDE team members are experts in their fields. Expertise of this level requires years of experience and education. Often, teachers and administrators in school districts are interested in serving as staff members of one sort or another at MDE but choose not to move into state service due to the incompatible educator and state employee retirement systems. Those who do come to MDE from local districts often do so after retirement and thus only serve in the department for a few years. The legislature needs to permit teachers and administrators who are interested in serving in state government the option to stay in the MPSERS pension system if they come to work at MDE.

We look forward to continued work with the governor, state legislators and legislative staff, and the director of the State Budget Office (SBO) and SBO staff, as well as the leading statewide education organization partners and local educators, on these and other priorities for the benefit of Michigan's children. The legislative year 2024 brings a new opportunity to continue the momentum begun in 2023 for the benefit of Michigan's children.

We can't build a better past, but we can certainly build a better future. The urgency is clear.

If you have questions, please feel free to reach out to MDE's legislative liaison, Dr. Sheryl Kennedy, at [kennedys7@michigan.gov](mailto:kennedys7@michigan.gov).

Sincerely,



Michael F. Rice, Ph.D.  
State Superintendent

cc: State Board of Education  
Governor Gretchen Whitmer  
Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist II  
Jen Flood, State Budget Director  
Kyle Guerrant, Deputy State Budget Director