



News Release

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Partnership Agreements Begin New Direction for Lowest Performing Schools

April 25, 2017

LANSING – Partnership Agreements to set a new course for the state’s lowest performing schools are being signed this week by local school districts, the State Superintendent, the state School Reform Officer, and local partners, announced today by the Michigan Department of Education.

State Superintendent Brian Whiston and Michigan Department of Education (MDE) officials began discussions in March with 10 school districts to develop the Partnership Agreements with the goal of improving achievement levels at the lowest-performing schools in Michigan. The 10 districts are home to 38 schools that the state School Reform Office (SRO) had identified for possible closure.

“I commend these districts for making the important decision to develop a Partnership Agreement that sets some ambitious and realistic goals to improve the academic achievement of their schools,” Whiston said. “A lot of hard work still lies ahead for all of us.”

The districts that already have signed Partnership Agreements are: Kalamazoo, Muskegon Heights, and Bridgeport/Spaulding.

Work continues with the East Detroit, Benton Harbor, Saginaw, River Rouge, Pontiac, and Detroit school districts and Partnership Agreements are to be finalized soon. A Partnership Agreement with the Michigan Technical Academy likely will not be made, as the charter school’s authorizer is in the process of closing the school.

In these Agreements, the districts have agreed to partner with their local intermediate school district, Michigan Department of Education, state and local social services and education experts, and others in their communities to provide each school with the needed resources to push improvements.

By entering into this Partnership Agreement, the threat of the school having to close at the end of the current school year is avoided. The progress of each of the identified schools will be monitored and given assistance when and where it is needed. There are timeframes set for in the Agreements when each school needs to show measurable improvements.

“These are positive directions the leaders of these districts are taking to get their lowest performing schools back on track,” Whiston said. “We want to provide as many local and state-level partners to help students in these schools be successful.”

Once an agreement is reached, the state School Reform Office has agreed to delay any next level of accountability actions with the schools, such as possible closure, in order to give the school an opportunity to be successful.

With multiple partners – including local board members, the intermediate school district, education organizations, business, community members, parents, higher education organizations, foundations – committing to be actively engaged, work will ensue to identify a plan of supports and interventions that will improve student outcomes.

Academic outcomes are a primary focus, and other whole child outcomes that can impede improved academics like health, nutrition, behavior, social/emotional issues also will be addressed.

Under a Partnership Agreement, the local district remains in total control of its schools with support from MDE and partners. If no agreement is reached with any of the remaining school districts, the next level of accountability would be implemented by the SRO.

Each Partnership District will be assigned a liaison from MDE. This person will be responsible for supporting the district in implementation of its agreement; helping resolve problems and breaking down barriers; facilitating discussions and meetings; and ensuring that the Partnership District receives maximum support for success from MDE, as well as from the partners and other state agencies.

This Partnership Model puts a broad spectrum of technical expertise and resources in the hands of the struggling school district, and allows local districts to use community and state-level support systems to drive improvement and self-accountability. The ultimate benefit would be to regenerate a struggling school to be one that helps students and teachers achieve at higher levels.

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