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MICHIGAN'S ESSA PLAN MOVES BEYOND UNTRUTHS AND EDUCATION RUST IDEAS

November 30, 2017

We seem to be mired in a culture where unsubstantiated claims and untruths are spewed out and attempted to be passed off as facts. No one is better served by that, not even the hucksters who try to peddle those tarnished and rusted wares.

When Michigan's plan to implement the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was approved late Tuesday by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, a group called The Education Trust-Midwest wasted no time in issuing a press release that disrespected the months of work and thousands of education stakeholders who built that plan.

They misused and mischaracterized the process between the Michigan Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education (USED) to get Michigan's plan approved. Constructive feedback from USED and outside reviewers was manipulated to try to discredit the revised final plan that Secretary DeVos approved and said will "lead Michigan's students to achieve at high levels."

The Education Trust press release used words like "glaring weaknesses" and "widely panned by education experts" that may have reflected earlier versions of the plan. What the "education experts" actually said was that the plan needed more detail; and there were no noted weaknesses in the final plan that USED officials deemed ready for Secretary DeVos' approval.

Officials at USED found the earlier versions of Michigan's plan to be "insufficient" and we recognized that due to uncertainty of which of three possible school accountability systems was going to be used. While some advocated for an A-F accountability system, the state legislature has yet to adopt a law to provide for it, and an A-F system is not required by federal law. In its stead, the State Board of Education encouraged a publicly-reported Parent Transparency Dashboard, which is included in the state's approved ESSA plan, and now is in development.

The "equity-minded advocates" the Education Trust press release mention would include the Michigan Students Achieve group. Among its principles are: "Michigan's planning around ESSA should reflect our state's values and priorities in education... our first and foremost priority must be our students and ensuring every child has the tools and access to an excellent school so they can reach their full potential."

Michigan's plan does reflect our state's values and priorities in education. That is why we submitted multiple options in the first round of the plan – in order to make sure Michigan's values and priorities led, and not the federal government's.

Michigan's ESSA plan does focus on ensuring that every child has tools and access to an excellent school. For example, in the "tools" realm, the Parent Transparency Dashboard is designed primarily to give parents the tools to understand their school's quality. In terms of access, our plan incentivizes and holds schools accountable for providing not only wraparound services to support the whole child but also differentiated pathways through which students can progress.

Michigan's ESSA plan sets ambitious goals and a timeline aligned with the goals and strategies to make Michigan a Top 10 education state within 10 years, and does this for all students. By setting the same goals for all student groups, the student groups furthest behind have the greatest needs in terms of improvement. We are setting ambitious, yet attainable, goals that will challenge schools in Michigan.

We appreciate those individuals and groups who were genuine and supportive of everyone's efforts to come together for Michigan students and educators to achieve and succeed. Outliers like Education Trust-Midwest had different opinions, and they were heard. In the end, the plan that Secretary DeVos has approved reflects a positive partnership of the education stakeholders.

Michigan's ESSA Plan moves away from the old Education Rust ideas. Michigan's plan is dynamic, innovative, designed to have rigorous standards, greater assistance to struggling schools, more opportunity for all students, and has more informative transparency for accountability.

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