



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

November 27, 2023

Dear Michigan Educators:

At a time of year when we reflect upon that for which we are fortunate, I want to thank you for being educators. Your expertise, commitment, and caring for Michigan's children are much appreciated and deserve respect and praise.

In our work at the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and with the State Board of Education, we focus on the needs of students and staff, as articulated in Michigan's [Top 10 Strategic Education Plan](#), approved by the State Board of Education in August 2020, and work with the state legislature, the state law-making body, and the governor with the same focus.

Last January, I sent a [letter to Michigan state legislators](#) to outline legislative priorities for the year to provide greater resources for students and staff, and to recommend changes in state law that would reduce burdens so that educators could focus more on the profession to which they were devoted. The priorities were outlined in three ways: the improvement of education through streamlining or other reductions (addition by subtraction), the improvement of education through increases or other amendments (addition by addition), and a miscellaneous category.

I am happy to report that this was a very significant year for public education in the state legislature. MDE worked with the legislature, the governor's office, and other stakeholders, including but not limited to statewide education organizations representing both labor and management, as well as educator preparation institutions, parent groups, and students. In collaboration and sometimes with vigorous debate, much was accomplished. As legislative activity has concluded for the year, I thought it would be good to share an update on our list of priorities.

Addition by subtraction

At the beginning of the year, there were several state laws that needed to be repealed or pared back. In the following areas, among others, we felt that less was more:

- **The State A-F Accountability System:** This duplicative accountability system was repealed in [PA 34](#).
- **Read by Grade Three Law:** The previously required retention portion of this law was repealed in [PA 7](#).

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- **Educator Evaluation Laws:** The changes in educator evaluation laws in [SB 395](#) and [SB 396](#), signed into law last week by the governor and now Public Acts 224 and 225 of 2023, will permit us to focus evaluations on improving the practice of educators, particularly those who are inexperienced or otherwise struggling, and will allow for educators to spend more time focused on the needs of children, both academic and socioemotional.
- **Teacher and Counselor Reciprocity:** Teachers and counselors with certification and at least three years of effective experience in another state will now be able to work in Michigan with reduced regulatory barriers, thanks to [PA 110](#) and [PA 111](#).
- **The Ability of Retired Educators to Help Out in Schools:** Retired school employees will no longer need to wait nine months with no earnings in public schools before returning to work in schools. The passage of [PA 147](#) allows retired educators, for five years, to immediately return to work in a public school, without adverse impact to their pensions, with a salary cap of \$15,000 per calendar year, in addition to other flexibility.

Addition by addition

The Fiscal Year 2023-24 (FY24) budget was another outstanding budget for Michigan students, staff, and schools to add greater resources to address overall and targeted needs that had been underfunded for years.

Among many other initiatives, the school aid [budget](#) this year includes the following initiatives:

- **Per Pupil Foundation Allowance:** an increase of \$458/student from \$9,150 to \$9,608 in FY24. Over the two years from FY22 to FY24, the per pupil foundation allowance rose from \$8,700 to \$9,608 per pupil, an increase of 10.4 percent.
- **Funding for Economically Disadvantaged Students:** An increase of \$204.5 million in FY24. Over the two years from FY22 to FY24, Section 31a funding for economically disadvantaged students increased from \$512 million to \$952 million, an increase of \$440 million or 86%.
- **Funding for Students with Disabilities:** An increase of \$155 million in FY24. In recent years, funding for students with disabilities has changed substantially, in both form and amount.
- **Funding for English Learners:** An increase of \$13.3 million in FY24. Over the two years from FY22 to FY24, Section 41 funding for English learners increased from \$25.2 million to \$39.8 million, an increase of \$14.6 million or 58 percent.
- **Funding for Rural/Isolated District Students:** An increase of \$2.7 million in FY24. Over the two years from FY22 to FY24, Section 22d funding for students in rural and isolated districts increased from to \$8.4 million to \$11.6 million, an increase of \$3.2 million or 38 percent.
- **Addressing the teacher shortage:** Last year, FY23, was the first in which a significant amount of funding--\$575 million--was allocated by the state legislature to address the teacher shortage, for efforts such as scholarships for

those preparing for the profession, Grow Your Own programs for support staff and students to become teachers, and student teacher stipends. This year, FY24, additional efforts to address the shortage include \$225 million for teacher loan repayments, \$15 million for a rural credentialing hub, mentoring and induction funding of \$10 million a year for five years, \$76.3 million to support Talent Together, and \$5 million for Teach for America.

- **Universal Meals:** All children in public schools have access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch. There is \$160 million to help expand to universal school meals this school year, and \$2.5 million to cover outstanding school meal debt.
- **Expanded Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP):** The GSRP per child allocation increased by \$458 from \$9,150 to \$9,608 in FY24. The eligibility threshold was expanded from 250% of the federal poverty level to 300% (and up to 400% in some cases). Lastly, there is funding to allow for extended GSRP pre-school programs, to offer instructional services to children 5 days a week (rather than 4) and 36 weeks per year (rather than 30).
- **Tutoring:** There is \$150 million for the governor's MI Kids Back on Track program for tutoring for children who are below grade level in reading or math.
- **Student Mental Health and School Safety:** The legislature appropriated \$328 million in per pupil payments to districts for student mental health and school safety.
- **Transportation Funding:** The legislature created a transportation fund, from which it appropriated \$125 million in FY24 for reimbursement of general education transportation expenses. The legislature also approved a study to reflect additionally on how the state should best fund general education transportation, included in the budget for the first time this fiscal year.

Other Legislative Efforts

- **Commonsense Gun Laws:** The state legislature passed major commonsense gun safety laws, including the safe storage of firearms ([PA 17](#)), tax exemptions for firearm safety devices ([PA 15](#) and [PA 14](#)), universal background checks ([PA 19](#)), and extreme risk protection order or red flag laws ([PA 38](#)).
- **School Infrastructure and Capital Needs:** Last year, the school consolidation and infrastructure fund was created, and this year there is \$245 million allocated for grants to support the initial costs of physical consolidation or service consolidation of school districts as identified by an ISD feasibility study or analysis. This year, there is also \$50 million to make air quality improvements (including HVAC and AC needs), energy enhancements, toxin remediation, or drinking water system upgrades.
- **Students in Congregate Foster Care:** [HB 4676](#) through [HB 4678](#) (which passed the House and will continue through the legislative process upon the state legislature's return) would require that children placed in foster care are provided with an education that prioritizes meeting the graduation requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum content standards, as well as the ability to receive educational records, to the same extent as students who are not in foster care. If passed, the bills would also require MDE and the

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Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to report on foster care statistics and would require MDE to regularly review any education program in a child caring institution overseen by MDHHS to ensure that it complies with the Revised School Code.

We have made tremendous strides this year....and yes, we have more progress to make in the coming year.

Transition

Governor Whitmer issued Executive Order 2023-6 in mid-July to establish an additional state agency, the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP), effective December 1, 2023.

The executive order affects seven departments within state government, four of which are related to the new department: MDE, Treasury, Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), and Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO). The new department will have three offices: early childhood education, higher education, and educational partnerships. Through this move, the staff and functions of MDE's Office of Great Start (OGS) are transitioning to the new MiLEAP.

We have worked with the governor's office to help facilitate, to the extent possible, a smooth transition, for the sake of our students, staff, schools, and other partners with and for whom we work on a day-to-day basis.

I want to thank all those who have worked in OGS over the last 12 years while OGS was a part of the Michigan Department of Education. I also want to thank all those who work daily in our schools throughout the state in whatever capacity in which you serve. You make a difference in children's lives every day.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy holiday season and new year!

Sincerely,



Michael F. Rice, Ph.D.
State Superintendent