

May 11, 2011

Honorable Chairman Paul Scott and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michael Egren. I grew up in Detroit, attended public school there, and have lived in this area for 60 years. As background, I have an A.B. in Mathematics from the University of Michigan and a J.D. from the University of Detroit. I was in the automotive manufacturing supply business for over 35 years and among my interests I am a member of StudentsFirst, a national movement to transform public education.

As an observer of what makes an enterprise successful or unsuccessful, and because of the experiences I gained in my own business, I am acutely aware of the importance of making sure the best people are in the best positions. Around 30 years ago I negotiated an agreement with our union that recognized the importance of having the best skilled and trained people matched for jobs whether for bidding new positions, overtime, or employment reductions.

This is an example of a creative policy that helped us stay competitive in a very tough industry for many years. Every business has a customer. In our business we had to ship perfect quality, exactly on time, and with the best value. Likewise, the customer in school is the student and parent. Everything needs to be done to make sure the students get the best teachers possible who are most skilled at the subject they are teaching so they can fully realize their potential.

Managers or principals need the flexibility to make changes that are in the best interest of the students. Rules that inhibit flexibility hurt the students. Locally we observed the impact on our auto industry which could not compete with companies that had greater flexibility.

Thus, I am writing to urge you to support the package of education reform legislation currently being considered by the Michigan legislature.

It is not unusual for old ideas that once had a valid and noble purpose to need re-examination in light of new priorities. There are many reasons for today's problems in some public schools. It is critical that we do everything possible to fix the system and educate Michigan's future citizens.

I recall how even fellow union members at my business would be upset with having unqualified people in their midst. I imagine many teachers feel the same way and prefer a system in Michigan that recognizes, rewards, and retains great teachers. Likewise students benefit from having better teachers. The proposed reforms are one aspect of the improvements needed to accomplish this goal.

I ask you to support ending the once important but now obsolete practice of seniority-based layoffs. In difficult times like we are experiencing today because of downsizing due to loss of student population or because of economic necessity these reforms become urgent. If education is important, than making sure the best teachers continue teaching must be a priority.

I also ask you to support the provisions for mutual consent. This will give principals the tools they need to build an effective team and result in the collaboration needed between teachers and principals to focus proper attention on the students – their customers.

Unfortunately, many students have suffered from an ineffective public school system in Michigan. Let's make the changes now that are in the best interests of students. Our young people depend on these reforms to get a good education, and our State depends on them for its future economic success.

I urge you to support these reforms.

Thank you,

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