

**Testimony Submitted on Behalf of the members of the Washtenaw Alliance for Education<sup>1</sup>, the entire Saline and Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education and the leadership of the Washtenaw Intermediate School District for HB 6004.**

We believe that the current state of education in Michigan warrants a thorough study and review, along with setting strategic goals, testing new models for innovation and using a funding model that is designed to achieve the strategic goals. Certainly Michigan requires some attention, as the American Legislative Exchange Council's (ALEC) 2012 US ranking places Michigan at #46 relative the other states for student achievement and gains for free and reduced price lunch-eligible students based on NAEP scores from 2003 – 2011<sup>2</sup>.

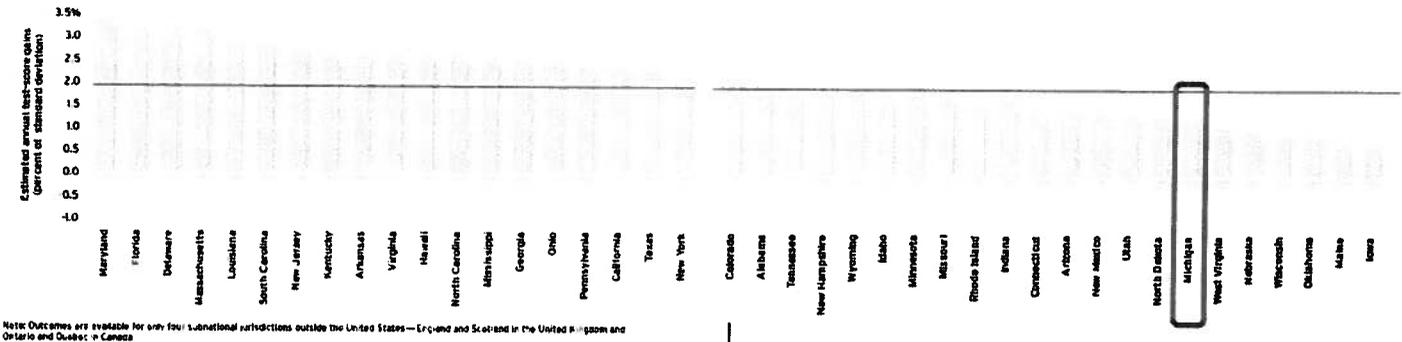
Michigan's performance is near the bottom in other analyses throughout this report, including the performance of middle and high income students.<sup>3</sup>

Student growth in math and science lags almost all states.<sup>4</sup> This is unacceptable, and yet current policies being vetted are likely to continue our decline.

Table 4 Ranking States by Achievement and Gains of Free and Reduced-Price Lunch-Eligible General Population Students on the NAEP 4th- and 8th-Grade Reading and Math Exams, 2003-2011

Jurisdiction	Rank	Jurisdiction	Rank
Massachusetts	1	Georgia	27
Vermont	2	Illinois	28
New Jersey	3	Idaho	29
Colorado	4	California	30
Pennsylvania	5	Iowa	31
Rhode Island	6	Alaska	32
North Carolina	7	North Dakota	33
Kansas	8	Alabama	34
New Hampshire	9	New Mexico	35
New York	10	Arizona	36
Texas	11	Kentucky	37
Florida	12	South Dakota	38
Hawaii	13	Connecticut	39
Maine	14	Oregon	40
Nevada	15	Utah	41
Montana	16	Nebraska	42
Indiana	17	Oklahoma	43
Minnesota	18	Tennessee	44
Wisconsin	19	Arkansas	45
Maryland	20	<b>Michigan</b>	<b>46</b>
Ohio	21	Missouri	47
Delaware	22	Mississippi	48
Wyoming	23	Louisiana	49
District of Columbia	24	South Carolina	50
Washington	25	West Virginia	51
Virginia	26		

Figure 2. Annual rate of growth in student achievement in math, reading, and science in 41 U.S. states, 1992-2011



Note: Outcomes are available for only few subnational jurisdictions outside the United States—England and Scotland in the United Kingdom and Ontario and Quebec in Canada.

Figure shows annual growth rate of student achievement in math, reading and science from Harvard's "Catching Up" report, referenced below.

We weren't always ranked so poorly. When Proposal A went in to effect, Michigan ranked #18 nationally in student performance. Our students have declined precipitously since then. We would urge you to consider that the work that lies ahead requires much more thought than the timing and potential

<sup>1</sup> See List of endorsers at the end of this document. The WAE represents 10 school districts and ~50,000 students in Washtenaw County.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.alec.org/docs/17thReportCard/ALECs\\_17th\\_Report\\_Card.pdf](http://www.alec.org/docs/17thReportCard/ALECs_17th_Report_Card.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG12-03\\_CatchingUp.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG12-03_CatchingUp.pdf)

passage of HB 6004, HB 5923 and the rewrite of the SAA currently reflect. A month or a handful of days to draft a bill and pass it are a huge disservice to the 1.6 million children in Michigan. Certainly they deserve better: a more thoughtful analysis, a more cohesive plan, ambitious goals and a better understanding of how education stimulates a more sound economy. Broader engagement of educators, businesses and the development of a bipartisan plan are essential.

The work of our representatives is to help position our state as a place that people want to live in; people of all ages – especially young families and new businesses – by representing the interests and concerns of the people that you represent. As such, we must recognize where we are starting from. We have overly-relied on the auto industry as the career goal and primary employment for our children. Certainly that was made clear when our unemployment rate exceeded 14% as the auto industry neared collapse during our recent Great Recession. We are enjoying a comeback primarily due to the current good health of the auto industry. But we have a long way to go to transition Michigan more into a knowledge-based economy. Our recent policies and budget have done more to harm public education than at any other point in our state's history, including a recent reduction of \$470 per pupil, which has remained in place this year, and is projected to stay in place next year.

At the same time, significant changes, new laws and many unfunded mandates have been already made into law. These were done so quickly that a good understanding of the implications was not known, and only now is being discovered – including miscalculations on the Michigan Business Tax break that will now reduce the School Aid Fund more than initially projected. Similar miscalculations and lack of understanding of implications are likely to accompany HB 6004 and HB 5923. Don't 1.6 million children deserve a little more time and understanding than this?

Specific cautions for HB 6004 include at least the following:

- The bill gives broad authority to the Education Achievement Authority, an entity that has been in existence for months and has virtually no history on demonstrating its ability to improve student performance for all students and/or address the achievement gap and/or effectively manage the operations of a school.
- Michigan voters rejected the kind of unilateral authority that the EAA represents, in their rejection of Proposal 1 on November 6, 2012, which reinforced that citizens do not believe that the state government, or any one entity, should have the authority to override local government.
- HB 6004 includes language that assumes passage of HB 5923 – another bill that warrants much more time and consideration, along with major modifications, such that we start creating bills that will actually serve our students in Michigan; not just reduce what we spend on education.
- HB 6004 refers to new governance models, yet to be defined, but certainly intended to bypass local elected leaders that represent the community's interests.
- HB 6004 gives broad powers to the EAA, without much of anything tying the role to improvements in student performance and providing our children with the skill sets that they will need to be successful upon graduation.

- The EAA creates a path for more for-profit entities to enter the public education market, which inherently means that these companies primary objective is to improve shareholder value. This commitment comes before all others in for-profit organizations; not students. We have more reason to worry about the impact of these organizations as more and more come in to Michigan to make a profit with little or no consideration to the long term success of our children.
- The fragmentation of school entities eluded to in this bill are the exact opposite of the direction that high performing areas have implemented in order to raise overall student performance and address the achievement gap. Wake County in North Carolina is an example of a successful model of integration, noting how important the integration of socioeconomic classes is for addressing achievement gap issues.<sup>5</sup> They have been able to also increase the student performance for all students. These are the kinds of things we should be studying.
- There is broad authority granted to the EAA with little accountability to taxpayers and the very students that are the core purpose of education. There is nothing in this bill that seeks to improve student performance, hold EAA's accountable for managing to student performance goals and nothing that holds the EAA accountable to local communities and taxpayers.

Examples include:

- That the EAA retains authority over a district, even if they withdraw from the agreement (p17 of HB 6004);
- That the EAA is primarily comprised of governor-appointed representatives, with limited discussion of the inter-local governing body's authority or representatives;
- That the EAA may acquire whatever it deems necessary to achieve its mission, including properties, leases, etc., but is not liable for these assets (p18 – 26 of HB 6004);
- May demolish any public school property that it now manages without the approval of the local governing board; etc.

In closing, we are urging you to be respectful of the people you represent by spending more time studying this bill and others that impact public education. The analysis must include what this means for students, families – collectively and individually, the funding implications and the expected outcomes. If this bill doesn't enable the kinds of outcomes we should be setting for education in Michigan, than it should be significantly re-written. Further, we implore you to develop a framework for education reform that significantly changes the trajectory of Michigan when it comes to student performance and enables a top-performing state, that achieves an education program and performance that improves the life options of all of our current and future students; that creates a foundation to grow a knowledge-based economy; that has a safe way to test innovative models of education while carefully incorporating the concepts that work; that supports and enables investments in our current public education such that students have the broad educational experience that creates high functioning adults (including programs and experiences that support behavioral and emotional growth such as athletics, arts, etc.) and that the state of Michigan strongly consider having education serve as a significant factor in its overall strategy to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce that builds strong and desirable communities. The implications for families and students of HB 6004, HB 5923 and the SAA re-write are

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<sup>5</sup> See Gerald Grant's 2009 publication, "Why There are No Bad Schools in Raleigh".

severe as we currently understand them. It is your responsibility to take the time needed to develop and pass legislation that improves education for all students and families in Michigan.

Respectfully submitted,

**Ann Arbor Public Schools**

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BOE President, Deb Mexicotte

BOE Vice President, Christine Stead

BOE Trustee, Glenn Nelson

BOE Trustee, Simone Lightfoot

**Chelsea School District**

Superintendent, Andy Ingall

**Dexter School District**

Superintendent, Mary Marshall

BOE President and WAE Co-Chair, Larry Cobler

**Manchester Community Schools**

Superintendent, Cherie Vannatter

**Milan Area Schools**

Superintendent, Bryan Girbach

BOE Trustee, Janice Kiger

BOE Trustee, Rita Vershum

**Saline Area School District**

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