

October 19, 2017 testimony at the MI House Education Reform Committee

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak in opposition to HJR M.

My name is Tom McMillin and I am a member of the State Board of Education.

There are many reasons to oppose HJR-M:

- A. It would centralize state education policy, further politicizing it.
- B. It would further erode local control of education by further centralizing the authority over state education policy.
- C. It would reduce access by our citizens to those who oversee the head of the Michigan Dept of Education
- D. It would remove the grassroots from the ability to nominate those who oversee the head of the MI Dept of Education, an important form of accountability.
- E. It would remove the ability for voters to directly elect their state board.

To support HJR-M means to increase the political nature of education. Anyone who has talked to public school teachers and administrators knows that one of their top problems with Lansing is they keep handing down mandates without understanding the consequences.

National Education leader and Former MSU Professor, Yong Zhao says, "America is the most successful country because we kill creativity less successfully than other countries." He says that our principles of less authoritarian education policy making is why we kill creativity less than other countries. If you put the focus of education on one person, the Governor, creativity in our schools will be killed to a greater extent. Short-term schemes and the latest fads that sound good will be pushed, because of political pressure, without understanding that in the long run, the results will be detrimental.

This notion that one person, a Governor, can "be in charge of education in the state" is foolish. For that to be the case, Lansing, and in particular the Governor, will have to have such a strong hammer to force the 600+ school districts to do his or her bidding, that locals will have no control. To support HJR-M means you truly

do not want those at the local level, those who know the children best, to “be in charge of education”.

While in the legislature and now on the State Board of Education, One of my main goals has been to push education decision-making out of Lansing and to the local level.

Mr. Chairman, last week, you mentioned what you said were the two most important education policies in recent years not coming from the SBE, but rather from the legislature...teacher evaluations and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading. However, if you talk to the local districts and those actually teaching children, you will come to understand that those two laws have done tremendous damage to education in Michigan.

Michelle and myself met with about 20 teachers a few months ago, many of them in disadvantaged districts and how those laws get implemented mean that those teachers spend much of their time making 80+ observations per student twice a year, rather than actually teaching the kids. They spend untold hours focused solely on whatever is on the test, instead of what is best for the students, because their job now weighs in the balance. Centralizing even more power in one person, will only compound these problems – and by the way, one big reason we have a shortage of skilled trades..yep, Lansing. As the focus has shifted more and more on “accountability” and focus on a state assessment and “raising the bar”, guess what? Anything not on the test, including shop and CTE, went by the wayside.

And word has it some of those on this committee want to keep raising the stakes on one statewide exam. The governor said he wants to – with a high-stakes A-F school grading system...even though doing so would bring tremendous harm to children in schools that are supposedly failing.

And yes, access by everyday citizens would be eroded. When Lansing was going to shut down 38 schools in Michigan, I and many of my colleagues on the Board went to those schools and understood what that action from on high would do. The damage it would reap. Do you know that I met little second graders that walk to school in Detroit in the morning, often in the dark for almost a mile...in areas most on the committee wouldn't dare be caught at high noon? And closing that school would mean those little child and many others would then have to walk a mile and half?

No...Lansing so often has no idea what their latest bright idea will actually do at the ground level. And some want to centralize that power even more?

The eight on the State Board are the Superintendent's direct boss. And we hear from so many citizens – asking far ranging questions that go directly to the Superintendent or his staff and an answer is returned to those citizens quickly. We go to the schools that the state says they will shut down. We meet with the activists helping special education students and their parents. We meet with the teachers who have lost all joy in teaching because of the heavy hand of Lansing that will only grow heavier with HJR-M.

And finally, yes, candidates for the State Board are nominated at state conventions by the grassroots, who are elected by citizens as precinct delegates and then by those, as state delegates. The scrutiny placed on those wanting to be nominated to be on the ballot is strong. They have to answer a myriad of questions from the grassroots and then the grassroots holds them directly and intimately accountable – just a few years ago, a Republican incumbent was denied renomination by the grassroots over the policies that person was supporting.

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, a committee I served on for six years, including chaired for a period of time...HJR-M is very bad policy. To support HJR-M is to show a desire *for* a more authoritarian school system; *for* further removing local control from those closest to children; *for* removing much of the access everyday citizens have to those implementing education policy; *for* removing the influence of the grassroots, *for* removing direct election of Board members and...quite frankly moving education and children to the same status, that a family farmer has with the DEQ and the average driver has with MDOT.

I would urge this committee to not push for a larger hammer in Lansing. We don't need to follow the lead of China to a more authoritarian education system that kills creativity quicker and destroys the joy in education. Reject HJR-M.

Thank you.