

Grand Rapids Board of Education Legislative Platform – 2017-2018

Grand Rapids Board of Education

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Guiding Principles

- We want the State of Michigan to be a “Top 10 State” in the nation for student achievement. This includes building an inclusive team and setting statewide priorities; studying and learning from top performing states and nations; creating a shared statewide vision; benchmarking policies; and investing to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students.
- We are focused on policy and appropriations that help achieve student-centered goals of kindergarten readiness, 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th grade math proficiency, and college-career readiness. These goals are aligned regionally with the West Michigan Talent Triangle, Talent 2025, and the Kent Intermediate School District.
- There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to education and laws/funding formulas should account for all of the dynamics to ensure each and every child achieves their full potential.
- Maintain local, democratic control consistent with the Michigan Constitution, state law, and core democratic principles.
- There should be a financial structure that ensures consistent, adequate, fair and equitable funding based on the academic needs of each and every student.

- New and/or future state or federal mandates should be fully funded with new revenue.
- The fiscal impact to the state School Aid Fund and the state retirement systems should be a significant factor of consideration for any and all legislation.

GRPS Top Legislative Priorities

The following are the district's top legislative priorities for 2017-2018. They are not listed in any particular order of priority.

New Funding Formula/School Aid Act Re-Write/Categorical Grants: Our goal is for every child to graduate from high school college/career ready. The State must fund schools to ensure the resources are dedicated and weighted based on individual student need. For example, we know that in high poverty areas students starting kindergarten are one to two years behind students in more affluent areas and additional effort and resources are necessary to elevate students' proficiency. The same is true for English language learners and special education students. We also know that it costs more to educate a high school student than an elementary student, and yet the per pupil funding is based on a single flat rate.

The findings of the bipartisan, bicameral Michigan Education Finance Study, commissioned by the Michigan Legislature in 2015-2016, prove the need to rethink, revise, and overhaul our funding formula. Key findings of the report include:

- The state is falling far short on funding our public schools.
- Michigan is underfunding the basic cost of education by more than \$1,200 per pupil.
- Resources for at-risk and ELL students are even more inadequate, falling far below recommendations of other Top 10 states. For example, Michigan only budgets \$1.2 million statewide for bilingual support services.
- The current system of funding Michigan's schools has been getting less equitable over the years.
- There is too much variation in per pupil revenues and expenditures across districts for Michigan's school finance system to be equitable.
- The study confirms that state education funding is not adequate or equitable, and it negatively impacts the most vulnerable students.

- The study recommends that funding for state and local sources be available for at-risk and ELL students equivalent to weights of 0.30 for at-risk youth and 0.40 for ELL students. GRPS currently receives a foundation allowance of \$7,511. If the formula was changed to reflect the weights for high needs, high poverty students, GRPS would receive an additional \$2,253/pupil for at-risk youth and \$3,004/pupil for ELL students. The 31A dollars that the district receives are at only 0.11 or \$826/pupil.

Thanks to funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, additional study is underway by the Michigan School Finance Alliance that is expected to build upon the findings of the Michigan Education Finance Study.

The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports changes to the Michigan School Aid Act to:

- Implement the recommendations of the Michigan Education Finance Study.
- Ensure schools are funded based on the true cost of meeting the individual academic needs of each and every child – and the (unfunded) federal/state mandated services for high needs students (poor, special education, English language learners).
- Ensure greater equity and fairness, including a per pupil funding formula that is appropriately adjusted for student needs, grade level, bricks/mortar vs online, etc.
- Protect the values of Proposal A.
- Maintaining the 2X formula and maintaining/increasing investments to 31A and ELL until a comprehensive solution may be reached.

Expansion of Critical Shortage List: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation to expand the Critical Shortage List to allow additional retirees to retain their retirement allowances and health benefits while working as a substitute teacher. State law makes it cost prohibitive for districts to hire teachers who retired between 2010 and 2015 by requiring a surcharge payment of 20.96% of their wages to the state retirement system despite the fact that retirees are not earning additional service credit and no other substitute teacher requires that surcharge payment. The Board also supports lowering requirements for substitute teaching and relaxing barriers so districts have an adequate talent pool of substitute teachers available when needed.

Ban Open and Concealed Carry in Schools: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes guns in schools – both open carry and concealed carry. The Board urges lawmakers to amend the Michigan law to add public schools to the list of entities at which a person shall not possess a firearm, except as provided. The current law already prohibits the possession of firearms in banks, places of worship, courts, theaters, sports arenas, day care centers, hospitals, and bars, but contrary to federal weapons free school zone laws does not prohibit open carry in public schools. The Board also opposes legislative efforts that would allow for concealed carry.

Flexibility for Vocational Education/Skilled Trades Programs: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation that would provide maximum flexibility for school districts to offer vocational education/skilled trades programs with parental input and permission for alternative credits to meet the Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements. The Board is encouraged by the Michigan Career Pathways Alliance recommendations but is concerned about the potential for unfunded new mandates and the capacity of schools and districts to take on new mandates.

Exempt from Headlee Rollback the local 18 mil levy required under Proposal A. The Legislature should act to guarantee schools the revenue generated by the 18 mil tax levy on non-homestead property, thus protecting districts from the effect of a Headlee Rollback and clearing up voter confusion around requests that are greater than the maximum 18 mil districts are allowed to levy, so there is cushion from a potential Headlee Rollback.

School Vouchers: The Grand Rapids Board of Education strongly opposes any legislation that would attempt to side-step the Michigan Constitution to provide direct support for students attending non-public schools through tuition vouchers, Education Flex Accounts, credits, tax benefits, exemptions or deductions, subsidies, grants or loans of public money, or line items in the appropriations budget. In 2000, the voters in Michigan overwhelmingly defeated a school voucher ballot proposal by nearly 70%.

A-F Grading System: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes an A-F grading system for school accountability. The measurements and weight given to the measurements in an A-F grading system are arbitrary, punitive, inequitable, and inherently stacked against schools with high need, high poverty students. An A-F grading system can assign poor grades to schools where significant learning and academic growth is being accomplished and where parents are pleased with the school. The Board supports a comprehensive dashboard school accountability system.

Pre Labor Day School Start: The Grand Rapids Board of Education believes that the start of school should be based on the academic needs of students, not the state's tourism industry. The Board is sensitive to the concerns of high tourism regional economies and the need for consistency and uniformity of public school calendars on an ISD or regional basis, so there is not a patchwork of different school starts in a given

region. The Board supports legislation that would allow permanent regional/ISD waivers to provide for a pre Labor Day school start.

School Calendar Reform: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports efforts to increase the number of instructional days and minutes for the school calendar, as long as the following criteria are met:

- Necessary resources are provided to fully fund the increased employment, operational, and facility costs associated with additional days and hours.
- Adding the calendar to the list of prohibited subjects of collective bargaining. In 2014, the Legislature increased the number of instructional days from 174 to 175 and eliminated the ability for professional development to count toward the 1098 instructional hours. The instructional days increased to 180 days for the 2016-2017 school year. GRPS and districts across the state were held hostage at the bargaining table up to the first two weeks in August attempting to negotiate calendars in the face of more than 30 hours of unfunded requirements. The Board believes that the district must have the ability to establish the district calendar in an appropriate and timely manner not subject to negotiations.
- Restore professional development time to be counted toward total instructional minutes.

Charter School Transparency/Accountability/Reform/Millages: The Michigan charter school law and the school choice law have created two separate but unequal public school systems in the state, resulting in redundancy and duplication of effort/services without the academic and instructional impact that was intended. Simply increasing the charter cap in an unbridled manner is not an effective academic solution targeted at where the actual academic need may be and it is contradictory to the need for more consolidation of schools and services. It also further exacerbates the insolvency of the state retirement system.

Michigan charter school laws should be reformed to increase accountability, require full financial disclosure and public transparency, establish a more fair and balanced playing field, require existing charters to be more strategic and targeted where academic need is the greatest, and ensure charters have a proven track record of success before being allowed to operate in the state. The Board also opposes legislative efforts that would provide opportunities for charter schools to be included in enhancement millages.

The State Board of Education and/or the Legislature should also establish a process by which traditional public schools and charter schools share information, best practices, and other ways in which all public schools can learn from what is working.

Proposed Budget for the U.S. Department of Education: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes President Trump's proposed budget for the U.S. Department of Education. The proposed cuts would have a devastating impact on students, teachers, schools, and our community as a whole by eliminating federal funding for after school programs and professional development of teachers. GRPS currently receives more than \$2 million in Title II funding for professional development and nearly \$4 million for after school programming.

Other GRPS Legislative Issues:

The following is a compilation of additional legislative issues for 2017-2018. They are not listed in any particular order of priority.

Retirement Reform: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports renewed efforts to address the unfunded liabilities and legacy costs associated with the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System (MPERS). While the Board applauds the Governor and state Legislature for recent retirement reforms, there is a false perception that the problem has been fixed when in fact much more is needed. GRPS alone has seen retirement costs skyrocket from 15% of payroll in 2007 to 36% of payroll in 2016. The Board supports smart, strategic, and ongoing investments to maintain the rate cap on retirement and to buy down long term debt. Given the complexities of retirement reform and the potential short and long term fiscal impacts to the state budget, school districts, and school employees, the Board maintains that any consideration of retirement reform must be done so in the most transparent, thorough, and deliberative way and should not be done during lame duck session. The Board also supports language to lock in the 3% reimbursement to ensure those employees in the original defined contribution plan have access to the new defined contribution plan.

Educator Evaluation: The Grand Rapids Board of Education joins the West Michigan Talent Triangle in supporting legislative efforts to strengthen and improve the educator evaluation system in Michigan with particular emphasis on the following:

- Providing more local flexibility for districts to pick/develop their high quality evaluation/observation tools.
- Reducing the student growth component from 50% and phasing-in the growth percentages.
- Increasing the percentage of the local assessment weight, since it provides a more timely and accurate picture of student growth.

Electric Choice: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes legislation that would put additional requirements on alternative electric suppliers that will increase costs on school districts participating in the Michigan Schools Energy Cooperative (MISEC). Since 1997, MISEC has existed to provide energy solutions to hundreds of school districts that rely on low-cost electricity and natural gas to keep buildings warm in winter, cool in the summer, and supplied with electricity for lights and powering technology. The MISEC is a non-profit administered by the Middle Cities Education Association serving 325 school districts across Michigan. GRPS alone has saved more than \$1.6 million by participating in the MISEC program (approximately \$250,000 per year). School districts do not have the personnel to ensure that utility bills from power companies are accurate. In total, approximately 10% of all electric and natural gas bills are incorrect, and of those, 75% are in favor of the utility company. MISEC ensures that member school districts receive one consolidated bill that has been analyzed by energy and utility experts. The Board does support language calling for an increase in the percentage of alternative energy required from 10% to 15%.

Expanded Tenure Reform to Include Ancillary/Itinerant Support Staff: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation that would expand the new teacher tenure law to include non-instructional, ancillary/itinerant support staff. The current law only applies to teachers and fails to account for non-instructional ancillary/itinerant support staff. As a result, schools are forced to implement two separate evaluation systems, one based on the old law rooted in tenure and longevity of service and the other based on the new law focused on effectiveness.

Early Childhood: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports a system of universal access to early childhood education, including a full range of early prevention, intervention, school readiness, four-year old program, developmental kindergarten, birth-to-five family, and children intervention programs, home visiting, etc. Any and all additions to existing programs or new programs must be accompanied by new sources of revenue that in no way, shape, or form should change or adversely impact the K-12 per pupil and categorical funding.

While the Board applauds the Governor and Legislature for the smart, strategic investment in early childhood, additional changes and investment are needed. Notably the per pupil funding for GSRP has been largely unchanged for nearly ten years and adjustments will be necessary to meet the needs and demands of an early childhood expansion, *including the need for transportation and all-day preschool as potential expenses*. The current dollar amount allocated does not cover the minimum costs associated with operating preschool sites.

The expansion of early childhood must also be accompanied by statewide standards for assessment and accountability. The Grand Rapids Board of Education also recommends that any significant expansion of early childhood should be phased in and account for time, cost, and infrastructure demands that would be associated with such

expansion. The state should also consider changes to the Construction Code that mandates PK through 1st grade classes be located on the first floor with an at-grade exit (few exceptions apply).

Social Media: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation that requires school districts to adopt and implement a policy regulating social media interactions between students and school personnel.

Computer Coding as a Foreign Language: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes legislation that would count computer coding as a foreign language requirement. The Board values the importance of computer coding and would encourage lawmakers to consider other options available as part of the Michigan Merit Curriculum.

Afterschool Programming: Afterschool programs provide needed and safe places for youth to receive tutoring, do their homework, and engage in enrichment learning opportunities that prepare them for college, work, and life. After school funding is a smart, strategic investment, much like early childhood expansion. After school investments are directly linked to higher academic performance, increased graduation rates, and reduced crime rates between 3pm and 6pm. It is critical that the Governor and the State maintain and increase funding for afterschool programs to match the \$50 million in federal 21st Century funds and explore other “crime prevention” revenue streams, such as Michigan Department of Corrections (preventative investment) or Michigan Department of Human Services Temporary Assistance for Needy Families fund.

Common Core: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports fully funding and implementing the Common Core standards. For four years, Michigan teachers have been hard at work implementing the MCCS, so students are better prepared to succeed after high school. State funding for this work was cut off on October 1, 2013. MCCS is overwhelmingly supported by school districts, local school boards, teachers, principals, PTAs, the state Board of Education, Business Leaders for Michigan, the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, and countless others.

Consolidation of Services: School districts and other government entities should be encouraged to pursue consolidation of districts, schools, programs, and services to strengthen and improve efficiency and quality, while at the same time reducing costs. However, there should neither be a one-size-fits-all mandate or requirement nor should it be limited to Intermediate School Districts. Any legislation to advance consolidation of services should account for the size and scope of a school district. It should also account for and reward existing collaboration/shared service agreements that are already in effect.

Teacher/Administrator Compensation: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes legislative efforts to require that compensation for teachers and school administrators be based “primarily” on student growth as measured by assessments and other objective criteria. Currently, school officials must use a method of compensation for teachers and school administrators that includes job performance and job accomplishments as a “*significant*” factor in determining compensation. The assessment of job performance must incorporate a rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation system that evaluates a teacher's or administrator's performance at least *in part* based upon data of student growth, as measured by assessments and other objective criteria.

Some legislative efforts propose to modify this provision to specify that, for teachers and administrators hired after implementation of the statewide performance evaluation system, including the student growth and assessment tool, school districts and charter schools would have to implement a method of compensation that included job performance and job accomplishments as the *primary* factor in determining compensation. Further, the assessment of job performance would have to incorporate a rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation system that evaluated a teacher's or school administrator's performance *primarily* based upon data on student growth as measured by assessments and other objective criteria.

Teacher Effectiveness/Parent Notification and Consent: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes legislation that requires school officials to obtain written parental consent to place a student in a classroom with a teacher rated ineffective on the teacher's most recent year-end evaluation.

School Choice: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes legislation that would eliminate local control and decision making related to school choice offerings and opportunities. School choice decisions should remain local with emphasis on the academic need of students. Students in persistently low-performing schools should be provided the first right of refusal for open choice seats. The Grand Rapids Board of Education strongly opposes school choice efforts that create a free-for-all system that dilutes accountability, transparency, and quality teaching and learning. The Board also opposes the so-called “parent trigger” for school choice.

All Day Kindergarten: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports maintaining language from 2011-12 that allows districts using Title I funds to maintain all-day kindergarten. The language was approved by the U.S. Department of Education and should remain.

School Board Elections: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes the state law that mandates school board elections be held in November of even numbered years. The new law unnecessarily eliminates local control, injects partisanship into non-partisan elections, and makes running for school board cost prohibitive. It also is out of

sync with the school fiscal year and Board of Education evaluation process/timing for their Superintendents.

Expanding Dual Enrollment/Shared Time Services: The state should enact legislative reforms that remove barriers and limitations for dual enrollment and “shared time” services.

Personal Property Tax Replacement: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supported the elimination of the Personal Property Tax with the promise and commitment that there was an alternative revenue stream to hold schools and local units of government financially harmless. The Board simply reminds lawmakers of this pledge and seeks to ensure that promises made are promises kept.

Union Dues: The Grand Rapids Board of Education opposes legislation that would eliminate local control and decision making related to the collection of union dues as part of local contract negotiations.

Anti-Bullying: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation that would add “cyber-bullying” to the “Matt’s Safe School Law” that was passed in 2011 requiring all Michigan schools to adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy and practice that protects all children regardless of age, race, income, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or native language, gender identity, gender, etc.

Jury Selection: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislative efforts to reform the jury selection process to ensure juries are more diverse and representative of the community. This includes, but is not limited to, providing counties with the names and addresses of taxpayers, utilizing zip codes for geographic balance, and not limiting the jury pool to just individuals with a driver’s license or state ID card.

FEDERAL Implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): The Grand Rapids Board of Education joins the National School Boards Association in urging Congress to ensure that implementation efforts secure balanced local-state-federal partnerships, maximize the flexibility provisions of the law, and support school districts through technical assistance and compliance resources. NSBA is working with lawmakers to effectively utilize regulatory oversight opportunities, including public hearings, and to provide recommendations for proposed non-regulatory guidance and regulatory provisions.

As the U.S. Department of Education initiates both regulatory and non-regulatory efforts to implement ESSA, we urge Congress to ensure that ESSA is implemented in a manner that: 1) recognizes the law’s clear directive to restore local governance and community ownership in public education; and 2) provides an opportunity for local school board members to meaningfully engage in the implementation process and provide input on non-regulatory guidance and proposed regulation.

FEDERAL Child Nutrition Act: The Grand Rapids Board of Education joins NSBA in urging Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to grant flexibility and relief for school districts to successfully administer school meal programs. We support the Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act and the Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act to reauthorize school meal programs. Both take steps to: 1) increase flexibility for school districts, particularly with regard to whole grain content and sodium reduction targets; and 2) meaningfully increase inclusion of the school board perspective in policy and implementation by the US Department of Agriculture.

We also call on Congress to carefully and compassionately consider the impact of community eligibility provisions and new verification requirements for their impact on families and school districts.

FEDERAL Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act: The Grand Rapids Board of Education joins NSBA in urging Congress to provide the necessary support to school districts to ensure that all students have access to high-quality career and technical education programs with a strong academic component and credentialing. Our nation's school districts continue efforts to advance curricula and address 21st century skills and knowledge. Aligning career and technical education programs with the needs of employers will help prepare more students for careers in various sectors and provide practical training through apprenticeships and related opportunities.

FEDERAL: Federal Education Investments: The Grand Rapids Board of Education join NSBA in urging Congress to appropriate investments in education that will: improve equity in educational opportunity; maximize the federal share of special education aid to help districts and states address the cost of educating children under the requirements of IDEA without displacing resources from other education priorities; and ensure that the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) are fully funded, as authorized in ESSA. Education funding should be of the highest federal priority to ensure that our nation's students have the opportunity to meet the challenge of world-class standards and responsible citizenship.