



June 2, 2022

Chris Harkins, Director  
State Budget Office  
George W. Romney Building  
Address: 111 S Capitol Ave # 6  
Lansing, MI 48933

Sen. Jim Stamas, Chair  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
S-324 Capitol Building  
Lansing, MI 48933

Rep. Thomas Albert, Chair  
House Appropriations Committee  
351 Capitol Building  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Director Harkins, Sen. Stamas and Rep. Albert:

We are members of the Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity: a coalition of civil rights, civic and business leaders working to promote educational fairness for all Michigan students, especially the most underserved. Our diverse, bipartisan table includes individual members as well as organizations from across the political spectrum. Our vision is to see Michigan as a national leader in public education, where all children achieve at high levels, regardless of race, gender, disability, family income, native language, or geography.

What brings us together is a shared set of values that leave no student behind. This includes a relentless focus on closing achievement and opportunity gaps by ensuring every student has access and opportunity to the educational resources and support that they need to achieve, from pre-K through postsecondary.

To achieve this goal, every student deserves funding that is sufficient to support their unique needs. Michigan must invest in public education and commit to supporting students who have been underserved for decades. The biggest increases in funding should go to students with the greatest needs and funding intended for high-needs students must be spent on services for those students.

We are also committed to transparency and accountability. Student learning should be assessed and publicly reported so that parents, educators, and policymakers can ensure resources are directed where they are needed most. Every student should be supported through an accountability system that is easy to understand, focused first on student learning and outcomes, and is regularly updated to inform the public.

We have been closely following the budget this year and appreciate the challenging work that you and your colleagues have taken on. We know that you share a commitment to improving our schools and providing students with the resources they need to achieve. With revenue estimates coming in close to \$1 billion above what was expected, there is a real chance to close the opportunity and achievement gap by ensuring these dollars go to our most underserved populations, including at-risk students, English learners, students with disabilities and students in rural districts. It is important to note that these students live in every region of the state and come from all demographics. Unfortunately, Michigan currently ranks among the worst states when it comes to fairly funding these students.

Now is the time to begin investing and creating a more level playing field. Although Michigan is one of many states that targets some additional dollars for at-risk students, Michigan's weight of 11.5% is among the lowest in the country. The story gets worse because historically, Michigan has not even fully funded the line item at 11.5%. Instead, the percentage lags around 9% in recent budgets. By comparison Maryland is phasing in a weight of 73% and Massachusetts is set to increase their weight up to 105%. Our long-term goal is to increase the weighted formula to provide consistent resources. In the immediate future, we are advocating \$600 million of the unexpected revenue be placed into at-risk funding. This will begin to address the long-term systematic underfunding.

Funding for English learners is also severely underfunded. Michigan only allocates a maximum of 11% of the foundation allowance to help address the needs of these students. This is the lowest weight in the country. By comparison Georgia provides up to 156% and Maryland provides 85%. Our long-term goal is to increase the weighted formula comparable to that of other states. We advocate using new revenue to double the current level of funding to \$50 million and using that amount as the baseline moving into future budgets.

Special education has long been underfunded despite the requirements to provide services. According to the Michigan Department of Education, special education is only being funded at 77%. On average, \$488 dollars of every per pupil foundation is used to cover the shortfall. Our long-term goal is to fully fund special education which would cost an additional \$700 million yearly. Michigan has taken steps recently to reimburse districts for some of these costs. We advocate continuing this reimbursement and raising this amount to \$300 million for the current year.

Another area that creates inequality is the higher cost of transportation born by rural school districts. According to a report issued by Michigan State University, transportation costs can be as high as \$973 per student. This cost is only going to increase as the cost of fuel continues to increase, taking away resources that could be used in the classroom. We advocate spending \$50 million in new revenue to specifically address rural transportation costs.

We appreciate your time and attention to these crucial matters. With unprecedented resources, now is the time to change course and begin prioritizing spending that meets the needs of our most underserved students.

Sincerely,

Amber Arellano, Executive Director  
Education Trust-Midwest

Deidre Lambert-Bounds, President  
Ignite Social Media

Dr. Leah Van Belle, Executive Director  
313Reads

Mike Jandernoa, Founder  
42 North Partners

Jametta Lilly, CEO  
Detroit Parent Network

Alice G. Thompson, CEO  
BFDI Education Services

David E. Meador, Vice Chair DTE (retired)  
Autism Alliance  
Detroit and Michigan Workforce Board  
State, Regional and Detroit Economic Development

Ken Whipple, Retired Chairman and CEO  
CMS Energy  
MI Achieves Leadership Council

Robert Dorigo Jones, Vice President  
Michigan's Children

Rachel Richards, Fiscal Policy Director  
Michigan League for Public Policy

Erika VanDyke, Program Officer  
Grand Rapids Community Foundation

Mike Rafferty, Executive Director  
New Detroit

Holly Windram, Executive Director  
Hope Network's Michigan Education Corps

Maha Freij, President & CEO  
ACCESS

Ben Locke, Michigan State Director  
Teach Plus