



# SCHOOL EQUITY CAUCUS

*Making a difference for the public school children of Michigan*

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Dear Colleagues,

Greetings from the schoolhouse! It's been a busy couple of weeks on the local, state, and national scenes as we witnessed an election for the ages, celebrated Veterans Day, and kicked off a new lame duck season. There are many things to cover, so let's jump right in!

## The Election

**National** - The political landscape was shaken as Former President Trump won his bid to return to the White House, winning 312 electoral votes, the popular vote, and – officially this morning - both chambers. While it will take some time to understand all that this means for education, we can be sure that significant changes lie ahead. The President-Elect has already begun nominations for his cabinet and is campaigning for prompt confirmations. He is on record as saying he aims to end the US Dept. of Education and return all educational oversight to the states. In the next breath, however, he has said full education funding will remain in place and that many new layers of accountability will be put in place. With any new funding and accountability requirements, it seems the need for some kind of Department will remain as well. It remains to be seen how the new administration intends to cover these bases.

Perhaps the most legitimate and impactful issue for public education is the President-Elect's commitment to full school choice, which typically translates to some kind of voucher system. There has even been talk of a sizeable allowances or tax credits for those who would choose to homeschool, and we can reasonably assume charter schools would gain additional support as well. With net student counts already decreasing across Michigan, this could be extremely consequential for our schools.

**State** - In Michigan's House election, Republicans flipped several seats to reclaim the majority and end the Dems two-year hold on the state's major chambers and offices of power.

The Republicans regained control of the State House and will have a 58-52 majority beginning in January 2025. Incumbents Jaime Churches (D-27-Wyandotte), Nate Shannon (D-58-Sterling Heights), Jim Haadsma (D-44-Battle Creek), and Jenn Hill (D-109-Marquette) lost re-election bids, though all other incumbents were victorious.

With Senator Kristin McDonald-Rivet (D-Bay City) winning Michigan's 8th U.S. House District, Governor Whitmer will have to call a special election at some point to fill her State Senate seat.

Twelve freshmen legislators will join the chamber in January: Rylee Linting (R-27), Morgan Foreman (D-33), Nancy Jenkins-Arno (R-34), Jennifer Wortz (R-35), Matt Longjohn (D-40), Steve Frisbie (R-44), Jason Woolford (R-50), Ron Robinson (R-58), Joseph Pavlov (R-64), Stephen Wooden (D-81), Tim Kelly (R-93), and Karl Bohnak (R-109).

### **Legislative Update**

A lengthy list of items has come forward for the Lame Duck session. Here are a few that we are keeping our eyes on.

- **SB 943-947 - Charter Schools** – There was standing room only on Wednesday, Nov 13, as Senate Ed Committee Chair, Dayna Polehanki, brought forward a package of bills that would create new transparency and oversight requirements for charter schools, or public school academies (PSA). Transparency enhancements would include revenue and spending streams, profits taken by EMO's, employee wage structures, and audit information. Oversight reforms would include requiring representatives of PSA's to be present for monthly board meetings and to have greater awareness of the day to day operations in the buildings they have sponsored. SB 947 would prohibit, or at least regulate, EMO's from owning a building and leasing it back to themselves for profit.

We encourage members to contact their legislators to voice their opinions on this issue, as positions may vary by district or region.

School Equity Position: Support

- **HB 5865-5867 - Dark Store Tax** – Tried and failed before, these bills would require big box corporations to pay their fair share of property taxes rather than taking advantage of loopholes in state law. There would be huge upside for education – potentially millions of dollars – if this package

would make it to the Governor's desk. Whether it can survive the gauntlet or even enter the arena remains to be seen.

School Equity Position: Support

- **HB 5735, MMC Modifications** – As presented to the House Ed Committee on Tuesday, this would effectively remove the names of specific courses (American History, Algebra 1, English 10, etc) and move the focus to completion of standards instead of traditional classes, allowing flexibility in the delivery, blending, and completion of MMC requirements. While we recognize the value in some of this, there are many logistical considerations that were not brought forward in Committee. How would a school track and certify a student's completion of standards, and what happens when that student changes schools? Are colleges, scholarship grantors, and the NCAA Clearinghouse able or willing to accommodate? Will more staff be needed to deliver blended courses with multiple subject standards being covered in the same classroom? Is this something smaller districts could even consider?

School Equity is not opposed to the concept of the bill, but would like to hear more from our members before taking a clear position, as there are potential equity issues at play.

School Equity Position: Monitoring

- **HB 6060, Pension Sweetener** – Looks to strengthen the Pension +2 and make more attractive to new employees. May provide opener for existing employees who opted for non-pension plan to opt into a pension.

School Equity Position: Monitoring / Support

- **HB 6136 / SB 1129 / SB 1130, 80/20 and Hard Cap for Insurance** – Bill packages hot off the press in both chamber to repeal or modify PA 152. This is a complicated issue with no simple solution. Big insurance increases are looming and different stakeholders are asking for different remedies, from raising the hard cap to repealing it altogether. Other discussions include making the 80% employer contribution the floor rather than the ceiling. Unfortunately, any path forward will include higher costs for districts, and greater challenges in awarding pay increases in other areas. We will continue to monitor this issue and report out any significant news or opportunity for advocacy.

School Equity Position: Too Soon to Say

- **Other Bills We Support:**
  - SB 23 – Increases FTE's for students in work-based learning.
  - SB 285 – Mandatory Kindergarten

- SB 964 – Changes to work permit issuance and oversight.
- HB 4279 – CTE millage could be shared with partner programs
- HB 4671 – Would remove requirement for post Labor Day start.
- **Bills We Oppose:**
  - SB 463 – Requires FAFSA completion for graduation.
  - HB 4907/08 – Expands Michigan tax credits for the film industry.
  - HB 5921 – Prohibits / restricts cell phone possession by students

## **2024-25 Targeted Goals**

At our November board meeting, action was taken to adopt a strategic plan for the coming year. This comes as a result of the robust member survey that was conducted from July to September and a series of meetings to determine which goals were the most actionable and on-mission for the Caucus. We greatly appreciate the feedback that was given and will continue to pursue issues of equity for all our members, whether they are specifically named or not. Please find our Targeted Goals listed below, including the rationale for inclusion.

1. Advocate for ***Infrastructure Improvement*** funding across all districts.
  - a. Huge inequities exist for districts with low land values and/or unwilling voters
  - b. Other states have models to address this
2. Work to reduce or eliminate tedious and unnecessary ***Competitive Grants***.
  - a. Inequitable for districts with low staffing resources
  - b. Unpredictable and unsustainable for budgeting year to year
  - c. Establish permanent funding for school safety and wellness
3. Pursue continued ***Transportation Funding*** reform.
  - a. Funding is still not equitable / adequate for districts with small enrollments and large land areas
  - b. Money is not arriving in a timely fashion
  - c. Difficult to budget for as a categorical line item
4. Fight for ***Staffing Solutions*** in shortage areas.
  - a. Salary subsidy programs for poor/rural/isolated districts
  - b. Temporary certification flexibility combined with enhanced mentoring to maintain quality of instruction
5. Develop partnerships and programs designed to ***Strengthen Small and Rural Districts***, without harming or alienating our larger district members.

That's all for this month's Newsletter. Look for our next edition before the holidays, along with upcoming Info Alerts as the Lane Duck session continues. In the meantime, we wish our hunters a safe and successful harvest, and all of you a very Happy Thanksgiving!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Keim', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brian Keim  
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