

Dear Senator _____,

We, the Okemos Public Schools Board of Education, are writing to express deep concerns with the recent upheaval at the US Department of Education (DOE), including massive funding cuts for public education. Public education is under attack, and, as an elected body dedicated to the students of Okemos Public Schools, it is our duty to advocate to ensure that school funding is protected and the DOE honors its financial commitments.

The DOE has threatened to withhold Title I and Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) funding. The DOE has also announced the cancelation of more than \$40 million in Covid related grants to school districts in Michigan. These decisions will have disastrous effects on public education. The funding cuts will affect all students, and will disproportionately harm the most vulnerable ones including special education students, low income students, English Language Learners, and students from marginalized communities that already face many barriers in life. Students who require special education, multi-disciplinary efforts, and additional classroom support are more expensive to educate, adding more to a district's per pupil spending. School children will be negatively impacted, and public education will certainly face a tremendous setback because of these capricious decisions.

There is a direct correlation between the amount of money spent on a child's education and their outcome in life. Studies have shown that increases in K-12 funding results in higher graduation rates, increased socioemotional skills, greater college attendance and completion, and reduced criminality in later life. Unfortunately, Michigan is one of the states that allocates the least for public education. In fact, Michigan is one of only two states that spent less on education in 2015 than it did in 1995 after adjusting for inflation. The trend continued into 2025 with the state allocating even less per pupil. According to Empire Center, Michigan spent \$11,482 per pupil in 2015. After adjusting for inflation, at the same rate, Michigan should would have spent \$19,225 per student in 2025. However, per Education Data Initiative, Michigan budgeted only \$16,208 per student. Therefore the \$2 billion in federal funds received by Michigan schools is greatly valued. DOE completely cutting Title I and REAP funds will cause irreversible harm to all students across the state of Michigan.

One of the primary responsibilities of boards of education is to create a balanced annual budget for their school districts. Currently, we are deep into the work of our 2025 – 2026 budget, and, like many districts, Okemos Public Schools is going to have to make tough decisions in order to balance our budget. Increased health care costs for our teachers,

caring for aging buildings, increased staff salaries, and additional supports for our students have increased our expenses, while stagnant state aid funds and changes to our Intermediate School District's special education funding distribution have resulted in drastically less revenue. It is imperative to note that almost 20% of Okemos's students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Not only will reductions in Title I and REAP funding impact us directly, but the State of Michigan will have to support districts reeling from federal cuts. The State of Michigan will be forced to attempt to do more with the same amount of money earmarked for education. Districts, including Okemos Public Schools, will receive less in state aid, fewer safety and security grants, fewer funds earmarked for mental health supports, and a reduced per pupil allowance. The Okemos Public School district will have to reduce spending to balance the budget. While we will try to avoid budget cuts that affect students directly, we may not have a choice but to leave open teaching positions unfilled, reduce student support staff such as counselors and classroom aids, and cut summer school and after school tutoring programs. These losses will be greatly felt by students, staff, and families, and will potentially have long term consequences.

Senator _____, we urge you to champion public education, including Okemos Public Schools, by protecting the Department of Education and ensuring continued funding. It is unconstitutional and unconscionable that the current administration is denying funding that has already been appropriated by Congress for public education. Please compel the US Department of Education to honor its commitments made to the students in the state of Michigan. We know that you value education and want Michigan's children to succeed. Please consider how you and your fellow lawmakers can guarantee that public schools and students will receive every dollar of the federal funds promised to them.

Sincerely,

The Okemos Public Schools Board of Education

Sources:

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