



SCHOOL EQUITY CAUCUS

Making a difference for the public school children of Michigan

121 W Allegan • Lansing, Michigan 48933
www.schoolequitycaucus.org
schoolequitycaucus@gmail.com
269-806-6159

January 31, 2024

Dear Colleagues:

It was wonderful to see so many of you at the General Membership Luncheon just prior to the Midwinter Conference in Detroit last week! Among other things, we looked at the recent Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference (CREC), took a deeper dive into the Section 22(L) Transportation categorical that was built into this year's budget, and had a legislative update from Matt Kurta. A big "thank you" to our business partners Northland Public Finance, American Fidelity, and The Christman Company for their support of the luncheon and the work of the Caucus!

The quiet times continue in Lansing, but budget season is on the horizon and the Michigan presidential primary is coming at the end of February! Here is a summary of the latest going on...

1. State of the State Address

Sporting a Detroit Lions lapel pin, Governor Whitmer delivered her 2024 State of the State address last Wednesday, lacing her speech with a number of musical references from the 1980s. In addition to reviewing many of the legislative initiatives passed last year, the governor also laid out some of her ideas for the upcoming legislative session. In the area of education, Governor Whitmer reiterated her call for universal pre-kindergarten for all four-year-olds in Michigan, and called for the plan to be fully enacted in next year's budget – two years prior to the original timeline she had previously proposed. She also called for the first two years of community college to be available for free for all high school graduates.

Among other ideas in the speech, Governor Whitmer made proposals to create more affordable housing across the state, provide state-funded rebates on the purchase of a new vehicle, and institute a new caregiver tax credit. She also suggested new initiatives to bolster Michigan's economy and infrastructure.

With Michigan's revenues returning to more "normal" pre-pandemic levels, it is currently unclear how these ideas would have the funding needed to support them. Perhaps we will learn more when the governor reveals her 2024-25 budget next Wednesday (February 7) in front of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. That presentation will officially kick off the new budget cycle. Watch for our overview of the major components of her recommended plan next week.

2. House Elections Moving Forward

On Tuesday, January 30, the 13th and 25th Michigan House Districts held special primary elections to determine the candidates that will face off in the upcoming special general election on Tuesday, April 16. That election will determine the makeup of the House, currently locked in a 54-54 tie.

In the 13th District, Democrat Mai Xiong will face off against Republican Ronald Singer, while Democrat Peter Herzberg will take on Republican Josh Powell in the 25th District. Both Democrats are expected to win, restoring the House to a 56-54 Democratic majority shortly thereafter. Once the new legislators are seated (following certification of the results), it is expected that things will begin moving again.

3. Metro Detroit Districts Being Redrawn

Another wrinkle in the razor-thin battle for control in Lansing, particularly in the House, has come due to a challenge to the current district maps in metro Detroit as developed by the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC). The filing argued that the districts as currently configured diluted the clout of voters – particularly Black voters – in the City of Detroit.

In late December, a federal court decision ordered that the district maps in seven Michigan House seats and six State Senate seats in metro Detroit must be redrawn. The ruling has the most immediate impact on the House with the 2024 primary and general elections looming. (The State Senate will not be back up for reelection until 2026.)

MICRC has been first working to revise the House maps, with the final proposed maps required to be submitted to the Court by March 1. At the point the Court will review them with the goal being to have the new maps in place by the end of March. At that point candidates from the impacted districts can file for the ballot. In the meantime, current legislators from the impacted districts have no idea who they may eventually represent, or whether the redrawing of lines may place them together in the same district.

Further complicating the situation, and due to the challenges of the drawing lines that meet multiple factors, most versions of the maps involve and alter districts beyond the original seven that were ordered to be redrawn (including the 13th District referenced in the previous item above).

While all of the districts would be expected to remain Democratic, two districts could potentially become more favorable for the Republicans, based on which map is ultimately selected. Even a flip of one seat would impact control of the House after the 2024 elections.

You can see the maps currently under consideration by [clicking here](#).

4. MDE Releases Professional Development Funds

Late last week, MDE announced the availability of \$140 million in grant funds under Section 35(j) of the State Aid Act targeting the improvement of literacy instruction. The announcement comes after the Whitmer Administration publicly released a letter earlier in the month that called the delay in releasing the funds “unacceptable”.

The rebuke was the latest in a series of events (including the creation of the new Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential) seemingly revealing differences between the State Board of Education/MDE and the governor’s office.

As it pertains to Section 35(j), grant funds will be allocated equally between the current budget year and next year. Districts are required to identify gaps in their current literacy practices and submit a plan to MDE that targets those gaps. Additionally, districts must ensure that 100% of their teachers in grades pre-K through 5 complete the training. The MDE grant announcement is available [by clicking here](#).

5. CRC Predicts More School Closings

Earlier this month, the Citizens Research Council (CRC) posted an article examining Michigan’s long-term population trends and their potential impact on Michigan public schools. For many years, the State has seen declining numbers of students in traditional public schools and, given projections for the next couple of decades, this trend is not expected to change. By 2050 Michigan’s school-age population is expected to fall by another 6% with the number of Michigan residents of retirement age (65+ years old) growing by an eye-opening 30%.

The article is a quick read and provides a succinct overview of the reality many of our districts will be facing in the years ahead. You can access the article [by clicking here](#).

With January coming to an end, we can begin to look forward to spring! As noted above, look for our overview of Governor Whitmer’s budget presentation next week, and as always, please be in touch with questions or concerns.



Dirk Weeldreyer
Executive Director
(269) 806-6159
schoolequitycaucus@gmail.com