



Ionia County Intermediate School District
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Partners in building full potential

COLLABORATION INTEGRITY INNOVATION SERVICE ACCOUNTABILITY DATA-DRIVEN

Board Report---March 13, 2025

- **Property Transfer Request:** The ISD has received a property transfer request for a property within Belding Area Schools to be transferred to Lowell Public Schools (Kent ISD). This will be on our April board meeting agenda for consideration of action or tabling; allowing the Belding Area Schools, Lowell Public Schools, and Kent ISD boards of education the opportunity to have any discussion(s) and/or formulate a recommendation should they choose.
- **Federal Update:** We continue to stay engaged with our legal counsel, education advocacy groups, and professional networks to monitor actions occurring at the federal level. Below is some of the latest information and developments.

U.S. Department of Education ‘Dear Colleague’ Letter

Week before last, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights issued a letter that offers insight into how the department will interpret federal laws, specifically those pertaining to discrimination on the basis of race.

The letter broadly concludes that *“treating students differently on the basis of race to achieve nebulous goals such as diversity, racial balancing, social justice or equity is illegal under controlling Supreme Court precedent.”* The letter states that federal funding will be withheld from schools that do not comply.

Ionia County ISD does receive various federal funds and they are an important part of our budget. It is of importance that we maintain our current services and do not jeopardize the funding for programming that provides essential support for our students.

The ‘Dear Colleague’ letter goes on to state that *“All students are entitled to a school environment free from discrimination.”* ICISD agrees with that statement completely, and will encourage and expect our employees to continue incorporating this belief into our day-to-day practices and operations.

Dismantling the U.S. Department of Education

There continue to be rumors and discussions at the White House around dismantling the U.S. Department of Education and the potential consequences for school operations at the

intermediate and local district levels in Michigan and nationwide. However, there are limited indications of what that impact could truly be.

The position of the ISD aligns with the widely held opinion that every administration – local, state or federal – should do everything they can to support strengthening the public school system. At the federal level, having a cabinet-level department signifies the importance of public education to our country.

It is important to remember that while these discussions continue around the future of the US Department of Education, there are laws and regulations in place to establish and govern federal school funding and those cannot or do not change because an executive order was or is issued.

However, the *restructuring* of departments and administrations is a common change that occurs whenever new leadership enters the White House. Those changes can happen regardless of how funding is disbursed to states and schools. We will continue to watch these developments closely.

Immigration Deportations and Student Concerns

Protections established under the Michigan Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA), the Michigan Revised School Code, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Supreme Court case law, such as *Plyler v. Doe*, remain in place for all students including undocumented students.

In collaboration with our legal counsel, guidance has been developed and our district policies reviewed to support our administrators and frontline staff members in the unexpected and unlikely event that it should be needed.

MDE Memo: LGBTQ+ Students: Protections and Supports

The Michigan Department of Education detailed in a recent memo to schools reminding them, and emphasizing, that schools cannot discriminate against students and deny them *“the full use or benefit of an educational institution, its services, activities or programs.”*

Michigan’s ELCRA prohibits discrimination against students based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

It remains unclear how new federal executive orders and certain interpretations of federal law may interact with Michigan law or how our state and federal legal system may address any challenges that arise, which it is anticipated will happen.

- **Michigan Legislative Update:** Governor Whitmer delivered her seventh State of the State address before a joint session of the House and Senate on February 26. She spent a portion of her time celebrating advancements made during her administration yet acknowledged “hard truths” around literacy and math proficiency. The Governor also called for lawmakers to pass legislation restricting students’ use of cell phones at school. The same day as this call to action, HB 4141 was introduced in the House and referred to the chamber’s Education and Workforce Committee. If passed, the bill would require school boards to implement a policy that prohibits:
 - Kindergarten-5th grade students from having cell phones on school grounds
 - 6th - 8th grade students from using cell phones during the school day

- 9th -12th graders from using cell phones during instructional time

Two key reports were recently released showing the status of Advanced Placement course participation and graduation rates in Michigan that are cause for celebration. According to Michigan Department of Education data, AP participation increased by 12.3% over the past two years; participation increased 28% for black students, 26% for Latino students, and 35% for economically disadvantaged students. During the same time period, the percentage of students scoring a 3, 4, or 5 on AP exams increased by 31%.

The Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information released data showing the statewide high school graduation rate reached a record high 82.83% in the 2023-2024 school year, and the four-year dropout rate fell to 7.68% - down 0.45% from the 2022-2023 school year.

House Republicans unveiled a legislative package at the end of February that indicates their education priorities for this session. We will be analyzing the bills and providing more information as movement through the legislative process continues.

HB 4147: Allows for use of funding for consolidation of administrative and service functions.

HB 4148: Requires State Board of Education members to be selected from districts.

HB 4149: Requires school districts, ISDs, and charter schools to post specific information online for transparency.

HB 4150: Removes fees for evaluation of teacher applications.

HB 4151: Modifies endorsement requirements.

HB 4152: Creates certain requirements for approval of teacher prep institutions.

HB 4153: Provides district-level certifications

HB 4155: Requires MDE to provide recommendations for curriculum companies and assessment companies.

HB 4156: Modifies merit curriculum.

HB 4157: Creates pilot programs for a state-administered assessment system.

HB 4158: Modifies references to M-STEP to include a state-administered assessment system.

HB 4159: Modifies core academic curriculum requirements.

House Joint Resolution E was also introduced at the end of February, which would amend the state constitution by requiring the Governor to appoint the superintendent of public instruction (SPI). The appointment would then need consent of the Senate. Currently, the State Board of Education appoints the SPI. The resolution was referred to the House Education and Workforce Committee.