

## **Rochester Community Schools PTA Legislative Committee Recap: February 5, 2016**

*\*Note: Legislation may have moved since the meeting date.*

### **For reference and discussion among Rochester Community PTA Members ONLY**

*In attendance: Barb Anness (Rochester High); Betsie Brodbeck (Hampton); Michelle Buettel (Adams); Jennifer Burn (Adams); Jeffrey Cuthbertson (North Hill); Amy DiCresce (Brewster, VH); Steve Hanley (Chair, Musson); Jeanette Howes (Long Meadow, West); Jeff Lauth (Reuther); Samantha Phillips (PTA Council); Barb Rill (PTA Council); Lisa Roscoe (Long Meadow, West); Julie Santonocito (Hugger); Dr. Robert Shaner (Superintendent); Jennifer Thor (Meadow Brook)*

#### **Tentatively neutral stance discussed on third-grade reading proficiency bill**

**House Bill 4822** (HB 4822) requires benchmarks for reading proficiency in order for students to be promoted from the third grade, and would provide early evaluation and intervention programs, and modify reading instruction requirements for teacher certification. The bill would end social promotion, but allows waivers for children with: IEP, ELL, proficiency via portfolio, or fluency in math/science. The bill would go into effect in the 2019-20 school year.

The Rochester Community PTA legislative committee discussed the progress of this bill at length and can best be described as taking a tentatively neutral position at this time. Committee members generally support the literacy intervention programs, but have concerns about vague funding sources and mandatory retention. Members will solicit input from teachers and reading consultants in the district to draft a more informed and more detailed position statement. At the moment, the committee generally favors local control, restricted and last-resort retention, and identifiable funding sources for literacy support and interventions.

There is general support for the intent of the bill, but many issues need clarification. For example: Children who already have IEPs receive special consideration, but will the reading interventions flag children who might need IEPs put in place? Will necessary support be available? What if children have low test scores, but nobody has investigated the potential need for an IEP?

The Michigan Education Association (MEA) has taken a neutral position on the bill.

HB 4822 passed the House Education Committee, the House, and is now in Senate Education Committee.

To follow the activity of HB 4822, click here: <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2015-HB-4822>.

#### **House Bill 5219 proposed to clarify hastily passed Senate Bill 571**

Late last year, **Senate Bill 571** was passed as **Public Act 269** of 2015. The bill made numerous amendments to the Michigan Campaign Finance Act. The issue that has come under much debate is this: except for an elected official in the performance of duties under the Michigan Election Law, ***a public body or person acting for a public body may not use public funds or resources for certain communications about a local ballot question during the period 60 days before an election.*** It states that communications cannot take the form of radio, television, mass mailing, or prerecorded telephone message, if those communications refer to a local ballot question and target the relevant electorate where the local ballot question appears on the ballot.

This prohibits, for example, factual information dissemination and discussion on ballot proposals during the two months leading up to the election. This legislation has been called a “gag order” and many municipalities and officials have called for its repeal. Some local representatives have admitted that they voted for the bill without fully understanding its impact.

Governor Snyder issued a signing letter when approving the bill in which he said, in part:

*[However]recognizing that many local governmental entities and schools have raised concerns regarding confusion with the new language in Section 57, I am calling on the Legislature to enact new legislation to address those concerns, and clarify that the new language does not impact the expression of personal views by a public official, the use of resources or facilities in the ordinary course of business, and that it is intended only to prohibit the use of targeted, advertisement style mass communications that are reasonably interpreted as an attempt to influence the electorate using taxpayer dollars. Local governmental entities and schools should still be allowed to distribute basic information about an election including the proposed or final ballot language and the date of the election. This is keeping within the spirit of the existing restrictions in the Act.*

In response to these challenges, **House Bill 5219** has been proposed to clarify the rules for communication by public bodies about local ballot questions. Opponents say the poorly drafted new legislation does not adequately reduce the ambiguity created by the poorly drafted original legislation. They would prefer to simply repeal Senate Bill 571. At the moment, it is unclear to local officials what can be communicated to voters. And it is unclear whether the original bill could be repealed or if it would require overriding new legislation.

To follow the activity of HB 5219, click here: <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2016-HB-5219>.

#### **Detroit Public Schools (DPS) restructuring to affect entire state**

**Senate Bills 710-711** address the financially distressed Detroit Public Schools and propose the creation of a new Detroit Community School District (DCSD). Key features of the bill include retiring DPS and funding the \$515 million bailout of existing DPS operational debt via an 18 mill non-homestead property tax (\$70 million per year for 7-10 years). The bill

would provide \$250 million in “seed money” from the state’s General Fund, as opposed to the School Aid Fund. The DCSD would report to the Detroit Financial Review Commission, which would include the new district superintendent and president of the elected school board. It would mandate the closure of charter schools that are on the bottom 5% list for 3 of 5 years.

*Discussion:* RCS legislative committee members expressed concerns about lack of clarity and leadership in formulating solutions for DPS. Past models and emergency managers have been ineffective. Currently, there are more than 16 plans proposed. Bankruptcy is also a possibility. In any event, it is likely that school districts across the state—including RCS—will be asked to “donate” some funds to lend financial assistance to the bailout effort.

In the interest of student advocacy for at-risk children who may not have a voice, the RCS PTA will investigate the issues further and consider proposing a simple statement that advocates for a solution that keeps kids at the center. With special interests and for-profit companies vying for control, it is important to remind lawmakers and leaders that all decisions should be in the best interest of the students. RCS PTA members have expressed willingness to serve on task forces or discussion groups to provide a strong voice for students.

To follow SB 710-11, click here: <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2016-SB-0710>

### **Anti- strike bills proposed in response to DPS teacher sick-outs**

**Senate Bills 713-714-715**, sponsored by Sen. Phil Pavlov, chair of the Sen. Ed. Committee, are aimed at discouraging teacher sick-outs by providing tougher fines and penalties for teachers and unions involved. The bills are a direct response to striking DPS teachers who have called attention to poor building conditions and learning environments through planned “sick outs.”

These bills are opposed by the Michigan Education Association (MEA), Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CO), and American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

To follow this legislation, click here: <http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2016-SB-0713>

### **Stay informed**

To stay informed about relevant pending legislation, RCS parents and families may utilize the following resources:

- Subscribe to the Bridge Magazine (electronic), which provides news and analysis from the Center for Michigan. This is not limited to public education issues, but includes relevant news. To sign up, visit: [www.bridgemi.com](http://www.bridgemi.com).
- Visit the EDVOCATE at: <http://www.theedadvocate.org/>.
- Governor Rick Snyder at: [www.michigan.gov/snyder/issues/education](http://www.michigan.gov/snyder/issues/education).
- Great Lakes Education Project: [www.glep.org](http://www.glep.org)
- Mackinaw Center for Public Policy: [www.michigancapitolconfidential.com](http://www.michigancapitolconfidential.com)
- Michigan Department of Education: [www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde)
- The Michigan Education Association offers two electronic newsletters: *Capitol Comments* and *Voice Online*. To subscribe, visit: [www.mea.org](http://www.mea.org).
- Please visit the Tri-County Alliance for Public Education website at: <http://www.tricountyalliance.org/>. Remember to check back regularly and sign up to receive e-mail briefs.

RCS PTA legislative committee meetings are held on the first Friday of each month, from 9:30-11:00 a.m., in the Rochester Community Schools Administration Building (Parker Room). Future meetings are: March 4, April 1, May 6, and June 3.

\*Discussions summarized by Amy DiCresce. ([amydicresce@gmail.com](mailto:amydicresce@gmail.com))