



Grand Rapids Board of Education Legislative Priorities – 2019-2020

Grand Rapids Board of Education

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Guiding Principles

The Grand Rapids Board of Education wants the State of Michigan to be a “Top 10 State” in the nation for student achievement. This includes building an inclusive team and setting statewide priorities; studying and learning from top performing states and nations; creating a shared statewide vision; benchmarking policies; and adequately and equitably investing to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students.

The Board is focused on policy and appropriations that help achieve student-centered goals of kindergarten readiness, 3rd grade reading proficiency, 8th grade math proficiency, and college-career readiness. These goals are aligned regionally with the West Michigan Talent Triangle, Talent 2025, the Kent Intermediate School District, and the Michigan School Finance Research Collaborative.

Legislative advocacy by the Grand Rapids Board of Education will be based on whether or not the legislation and/or appropriations meets the following three core principles:

- It must be based on the **individual needs of students**.
- It must reflect the **individual characteristics of districts**.
- It must provide for **local control to implement evidenced-based reforms** to support the individual needs and characteristics of students and districts.



New Funding Formula/School Aid Act Re-Write/Categorical Grants: Our goal is for every child to graduate from high school college/career ready. The State must fund schools to ensure the resources are dedicated and weighted based on individual student need. For example, we know that in high poverty areas students starting kindergarten are one to two years behind students in more affluent areas and additional effort and resources are necessary to elevate students' proficiency. The same is true for English language learners and special education students. We also know that it costs more to educate a high school student than an elementary student, and yet the per pupil funding is based on a single flat rate.

The findings of the bipartisan, bicameral Michigan Education Finance Study, commissioned by the Michigan Legislature in 2015-2016, prove the need to rethink, revise, and overhaul our funding formula. Key findings of the report include:

- The state is falling far short on funding our public schools.
- Michigan is underfunding the basic cost of education by more than \$1,200 per pupil.
- Resources for at-risk and ELL students are even more inadequate, falling far below recommendations of other Top 10 states. For example, Michigan only budgets \$1.2 million statewide for bilingual support services.
- The current system of funding Michigan's schools has been getting less equitable over the years.
- There is too much variation in per pupil revenues and expenditures across districts for Michigan's school finance system to be equitable.
- The study confirms that state education funding is not adequate or equitable, and it negatively impacts the most vulnerable students.
- The study recommends that funding for state and local sources be available for at-risk and ELL students equivalent to weights of 0.30 for at-risk youth and 0.40 for ELL students. GRPS currently receives a foundation allowance of \$7,511. If the formula was changed to reflect the weights for high needs, high poverty students, GRPS would receive an additional \$2,253/pupil for at-risk youth and \$3,004/pupil for ELL students. The 31A dollars that the district receives are at only 0.11 or \$826/pupil.



In 2018, the Michigan School Finance Collaborative, a collaboration between education and business leaders, revealed results of comprehensive school adequacy study that provided a new framework for funding Michigan’s schools. Much of the findings were consistent and aligned with the Legislature’s adequacy study.

Then most recently, in January 24, 2019, Michigan State University released a report titled “Michigan School Finance at the Crossroads: A Quarter Century of State Control.” The report validated the findings of the Michigan School Finance Collaborative.

Based on the research and overwhelming data that proves Michigan is inadequately and inequitably investing in public education, the Grand Rapids Board of Education supports changes to the Michigan School Aid Act to:

- Implement the recommendations of the Michigan Education Finance Study and the Michigan School Finance Collaborative.
- Ensure schools are funded based on the true cost of meeting the individual academic needs of each and every child – and the (unfunded) federal/state mandated services for high needs students (poor, special education, English language learners).
- Ensure greater equity and fairness, including a per pupil funding formula that is appropriately adjusted for student needs, grade level, bricks/mortar vs online, etc.
- Protect the values of Proposal A to achieve greater equity between the highest and lowest funded districts while maintaining property tax relief.
- Maintaining the 2X formula and maintaining/increasing investments to 31A and ELL until a comprehensive solution may be reached.

Expansion of Critical Shortage List: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation to expand the Critical Shortage List to allow additional retirees to retain their retirement allowances and health benefits while working as a substitute teacher. State law makes it cost prohibitive for districts to hire teachers who retired between 2010 and 2015 by requiring a surcharge payment of 20.96% of their wages to the state retirement system despite the fact that retirees are not earning additional service credit and no other substitute teacher requires that surcharge payment. The Board also supports lowering requirements for substitute teaching and relaxing barriers so districts have an adequate talent pool of substitute teachers available when needed



Educator Evaluation: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation to reduce the student growth component of educator evaluation from 40% to 25%. The Board also joins the West Michigan Talent Triangle in supporting legislative efforts to strengthen and improve the educator evaluation system in Michigan. This includes providing more local flexibility for districts to pick/develop their high quality evaluation/observation tools and increasing the percentage of the local assessment weight, since it provides a more timely and accurate picture of student growth.

Afterschool Programming: Afterschool programs provide needed and safe places for youth to receive tutoring, do their homework, and engage in enrichment learning opportunities that prepare them for college, work, and life. After school funding is a smart, strategic investment, much like early childhood expansion. After school investments are directly linked to higher academic performance, increased graduation rates, and reduced crime rates between 3pm and 6pm. It is critical that the Governor and the State maintain and increase funding for afterschool programs to match the \$50 million in federal 21st Century funds and explore other “crime prevention” revenue streams, such as Michigan Department of Corrections (preventative investment) or Michigan Department of Human Services Temporary Assistance for Needy Families fund.

Educator Recruitment and Preparation: The Grand Rapids Board of Education supports legislation, collaboratively developed with higher education institutions, to strengthen and improve educator recruitment and preparation.