



HB 5268 — A smart way to help struggling schools & districts

Introduced by Rep. Lipton, assigned to the Education Committee; analysis as of 2/2/2014

Why this deserves your attention:

As parents, we want the best for our children. As members of our communities, we want for every child what we would want for our own. Every child deserves a quality education, and our public schools need to be able to offer that education. Sometimes schools and districts struggle, but our current “solution” is to threaten to take them over and toss them into a state-run school district. At the moment, that district would be run by the troubled EAA. A better way would be to provide expert help in diagnosing problems at the local level, and then offering firm guidance while local stakeholders agree on solutions.

What the bill would do

Our current law was passed in a tremendous rush in late 2009 as part of Michigan’s unsuccessful effort to win federal Race to the Top funding. The law specifies that schools in the “bottom 5%” of test score rankings must propose plans to improve their performance. If they do not succeed in improving, they can be taken over completely by the state and placed into the state reform district. What happens from then on is anyone’s guess, but the troubled Education Achievement Authority has the contract to run those schools. No schools have been placed in the district so far, but that could soon change.

This bill would replace that system, based on unrestrained state takeover for low test scores, with a system that would help diagnose and solve the problems faced by a particular school or district. Intermediate School Districts would provide expert assistance to perform “education audits” and evaluate a wide range of school and district policies, curricula and other issues. Based on the audit findings, the expert team would recommend certain changes and priorities.

With the help of the state and ISD, the members of the school community—including parents, teachers, administrators, staff, and community members—would hammer out an agreement to implement the expert team’s recommendations. If they can’t agree, the state has the power to insist—but only on measures that address the diagnosed problems.

Finally, the school, district and state officials would monitor the plan’s progress, and make adjustments as needed over time. Schools that “graduate” from this process would still receive support to continue their progress.

OUR TAKE

This bill implements our Parent Proposal to Assist Struggling Schools (mipfs.org/parent-proposal), and MIPFS worked closely with Rep. Lipton to draft and refine the bill. It’s based on techniques used in Michigan some years ago which never had the funding or teeth to be truly effective.

- Instead of state takeover which freezes out the local community, this bill would make sure all local stakeholders had the power and responsibility for coming up with a workable plan. This makes it more likely that the plan will be implemented and stand the test of time.
- Instead of experimenting on schools and students based on some current fad, this system would carefully diagnose problems and offer tested, research-based solutions that meet local needs.
- Instead of taking over a single school, scooping it up and subjecting it to rounds of restructuring, this system would address district-wide problems and needs, helping to improve all of a community’s schools.
- Most importantly, this system would respect and strengthen local community governance of our schools, helping us to find solutions to stubborn problems and help all our children.

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