



March 16, 2010

Ms. Cindy Fairfield, Editor
The Muskegon Chronicle
981 Third Street
PO Box 59
Muskegon, MI 49443-0059

Dear Ms. Fairfield:

Hope for the future of Michigan.
A balanced approach to school funding.
Reforms and restored funding.

These are the components of a plan recently introduced by 17 organizations united under one umbrella: "SOS Michigan: Save Our Students, Save Our Schools, Save Our State." The plan is supported by thousands of school employees and parents. It is a direct response to the structural deficit facing public schools. This deficit is "taxing" our children through larger class sizes, limited or no bussing, and cuts in programs, materials, and equipment. SOS members are cooperatively seeking a reformed system for funding K-12 education that is equitable, adequate, and predictable.

Schools are ready for **reform**. We believe school employees are worthy of compensation and benefit programs that reflect the important role they play in children's lives. At the same time, new laws must be enacted that allow schools to provide pay and benefits in more cost-effective ways. One such law would allow access to a statewide healthcare pool for all public employees. While worth considering in the long term, this change would do little to reduce costs right away.

Other reforms can be readily implemented and offer more immediate savings for schools. For example, all public school employees could be required to pay a minimum portion of their health insurance premiums, and a cap could be established for the employer contribution. Decreasing the state-mandated retirement costs for school employees would also provide direct relief. Retirement costs have increased from 11.66% of payroll in 1999-2000 to 16.94% in 2009-10 and will increase to 19.41% in 2010-11.

Proposal A, which restructured school funding beginning in 1994-95, created a dependency on the state for approximately 90% of a K-12 district's total revenue. Now sales tax is the main source of state revenue to cover the day-to-day operations of local public schools. Unfortunately our slow economy has resulted in less tax collection for the state and cuts in the current "per-pupil" school funding method.

In six years' time there are over 100,000 fewer K-12 students in Michigan's public (and charter) schools. In Muskegon County there are 907 fewer students enrolled in public (and charter) schools in 2009-10 compared to 2008-09 which means schools received \$6.8 million less in

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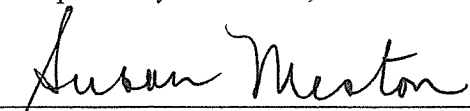
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revenue. The SOS plan calls for a review and **restructure** of Michigan's school funding system to realize a long-term remedy and put a stop to the string of ineffective quick fixes and "wait and see" responses by lawmakers.

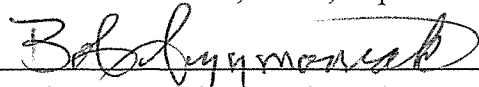
Reform and restructuring are not the only solutions. **Revenues** must be raised to cover the \$100 million needed to balance the School Aid budget passed by lawmakers. Revenues are needed to fund the technology, staffing, and programs that support academic success. Revenues to restore funding could be realized by closing wasteful or ineffective loopholes in current tax laws. The sales tax could be expanded to services, and the state could eliminate planned reductions in the income tax rate. All of these would provide critical dollars needed for the children in our state.

Those of us who serve as superintendents of the public school districts within the Muskegon Area ISD support the plan outlined by SOS. We urge you to review it for yourself at www.sosmichigan.com and click on "SOS Position Statement: Policies for a Stronger Michigan." If changes are not made soon, student programming will be further reduced, more jobs will be lost, and more districts will be forced to borrow funds (with interest) from the State of Michigan to meet payroll. Michigan's school funding system is failing our children; change is needed now.

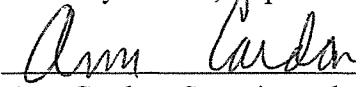
Respectfully submitted,



Susan W. Meston, Ph.D., Superintendent, Muskegon Area ISD



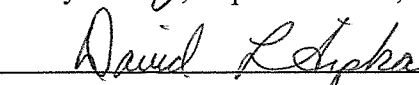
Bob Szymoniak, Superintendent, Fruitport Community Schools



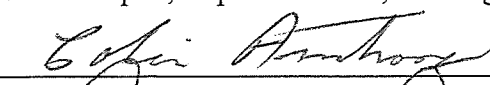
Ann Cardon, Superintendent, Holton Public Schools



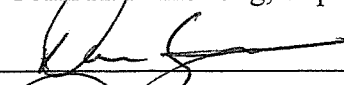
Terry Babbitt, Superintendent, Mona Shores Public Schools



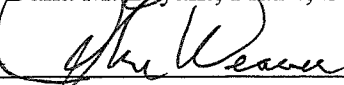
David Sipka, Superintendent, Montague Area Public Schools



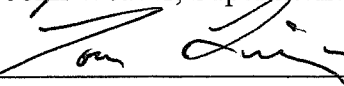
Colin K. Armstrong, Superintendent, Muskegon Public Schools



Dana M. Bryant, Ph.D., Superintendent, Muskegon Heights Public Schools



John Weaver, Superintendent, North Muskegon Public Schools

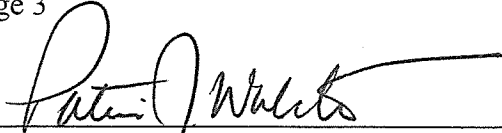


Tom Livezey, Superintendent, Oakridge Public Schools

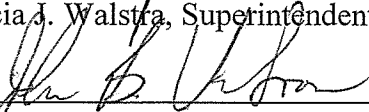
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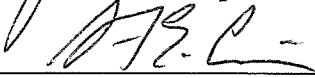
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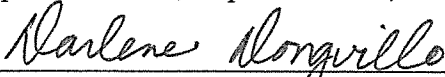
Patricia J. Walstra, Superintendent, Orchard View Schools



John VanLoon, Superintendent, Ravenna Public Schools



Stephen Cousins, Superintendent, Reeths-Puffer Schools



Darlene Dongvillo, Superintendent, Whitehall District Schools