

January 18, 2011

Dear MEA members,

“The mission of the MEA is to ensure that the education of our students and the working environments of our members are of the highest quality.”

This is the Michigan Education Association’s mission in good economic times and bad. It is our mission in working with our members, with lawmakers and with the public. And it is our mission regardless of who holds the seats of power in our state government.

In 2011, MEA will continue to advocate for what we believe in and will work proactively in Lansing – with members of both parties – to ensure every Michigan student gets a world-class education. That is why today we are proud to release “MEA’s A+ Agenda: Action, Accountability and Achievement.”

This year will bring calls for a wide variety of reform in our state. Some of those reforms will be worthwhile and truthfully aimed at moving Michigan forward through strategies based on credible research, sound public policy and the best interests of our state’s economy, communities and students. MEA’s A+ Agenda seeks to embrace these reforms and show, in no uncertain terms, that MEA is ready and willing to work with our state’s leaders to return Michigan to national prominence and economic health.

Unfortunately, other “reforms” will simply be attacks – attacks on communities, attacks on working families, attacks on public employees, attacks on unions, and attacks on public education. Rest assured, MEA will stand and fight these attacks with every resource at our disposal.

We hope that Governor Snyder’s calls for a different way of doing business will hold true and a spirit of bipartisanship and cooperation will lead Michigan to a brighter future. MEA chooses to take this first step in that process. We look forward to working throughout this year to implement our A+ Agenda and fulfill our mission for the school employees and students of our great state.

Sincerely,



Iris K. Salters
MEA President

MEA's **A+** Agenda

Action, Accountability & Achievement

MEA believes we must focus on five areas in 2011 to ensure our public schools fulfill their mission of preparing students for the workplace and moving Michigan forward.

- 1.** Realign Michigan's PreK-12 system to support students in achieving the goal our state values most: graduating high school ready to succeed in college or other post-secondary opportunities.
 - 2.** Increase accountability for EVERYONE in public education – teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, et al – for the overall educational success of Michigan's students.
 - 3.** Increase efficiency for ALL school districts to get the greatest return on investment for students, communities and the economy.
 - 4.** Ensure good stewardship of taxpayer dollars by increasing school district financial stability and accountability.
 - 5.** Fix Michigan's antiquated tax structure that has led to Michigan's decade-long budget crisis.
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• **Realign Michigan's PreK-12 system to support students in achieving the goal our state values most: graduating high school ready to succeed in college or other post-secondary opportunities.**

- a. Align and commit long-term to a curriculum that supports successful high school completion, flowing from comprehensive early childhood programming to progressively challenging, developmentally appropriate standards for the elementary, middle and high school levels. This must include high-quality assessments that measure content proficiency and ability to use content in tandem with critical thinking and problem solving skills, as well as continued attention to providing a continuum of services that help ALL students achieve their full potential.
- b. Drastically reduce the amount of remedial coursework required by students at the college level. Complete a comprehensive study with community colleges and state higher education institutions regarding current remediation work and existing gaps between PK-12 and 13-16 curriculums.
- c. Consolidate and coordinate early childhood programming with the current K-12 system to ensure all children are provided with an adequate educational baseline for their academic careers. Fully fund and implement all-day kindergarten, with appropriate exceptions for developmental kindergarten programming. Offer early childhood programming in concert with parental programming to engage both in the educational process from an early age.
- d. Adopt "Multiple Pathway" models that use college and vocational/career preparation content to enhance student learning, provide outlets for practical application, expose students to a variety of learning styles and options, and successfully transition students from the PK-12 system to an appropriate post-secondary educational path.
- e. Develop a statewide clearinghouse for school districts and public school academies to share best practices and successful strategies for improving student achievement, including models and support systems to address increasing rates of student poverty and its detrimental effects on both student learning and graduation rates.
- f. Use rigorous academic research prior to and after implementation of "school reform" concepts to ensure they meet stated goals.

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• **Increase accountability for EVERYONE in public education – teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, et al – for the overall educational success of Michigan's students.**

- a. Streamline the process to discharge ineffective tenured teachers, with a goal of reducing the time and expense of the current process. "Ineffectiveness" must be proven through use of fair, impartial processes and standards, including locally-negotiated evaluation systems based on multiple measures (as provided for in the MDE-endorsed "Michigan Framework for Teacher Evaluations").
- b. Require administrators to be trained annually in the district's approved evaluation procedures and other academic leadership skills to ensure high-quality feedback for all employees, with failure to do so subject to reporting through school district transparency reporting.
- c. Require that annual evaluations are completed for all teachers as mandated in current state law. Further, require district administrators to annually evaluate all employees working in the district, including those working for private contractors, to ensure quality work is being done on behalf of students and taxpayers.
- d. Completion of required administrator evaluation training and annual employee evaluations must be accurately tracked and publicly reported through current school district transparency procedures.
- e. Require school districts, as well as other school employers/private contractors, to provide state-mandated professional development hours for ALL employees – not only for teachers. This employer-provided professional development must include specific job-related skills for particular employee groups and training in effective techniques for student interaction/relationship building, dropout identification and prevention, and parental engagement – all of which are proven to have direct positive outcomes for student learning.
- f. Adopt a "Michigan Parental Involvement in Education Act," requiring employers to release employees who are parents and/or guardians of school-aged children to allow for attendance of parent-teacher conferences and other approved school interactions. This would address a common cause of concern for parents who cannot get time away from work to interact with their child's education without risk to their continued employment.

3. Increase efficiency for ALL school districts to get the greatest return on investment for students, communities and the economy.

- a. Provide clearer, more consistent structure to the process of consolidating school districts. The current hodgepodge of mechanisms and rules for consolidation fail to provide for a smooth transition into consolidated operations. Streamline the process, creating one well-designed path to consolidation that local school boards and communities can vote to approve. This process should provide for adequate time to create the new district, should preserve employees' jobs to the degree needed for the new district, and preserve the job rights and representation for employees consistent with state law.
- b. Provide greater structure and oversight for the consolidation of administrative and support services. Ensure savings are present prior to any consolidation through an independent, high-quality, comprehensive cost benefit analysis – and follow up after consolidations to ensure estimated savings are present. Focus on administrative consolidation first, where greater savings can be achieved with less impact on student services. Ensure the same job protections outlined above for district consolidations are present for service consolidations, with particular emphasis for retaining public employees.
- c. Bids from private companies to provide consolidated services must include the same independent, high-quality, comprehensive cost-benefit analysis as required for service consolidation above, including ongoing monitoring to ensure savings. Bids must accurately compare the exact services being provided. Preference should go to Michigan firms making bids, and those firms should offer employment to displaced school district workers before hiring others from outside the district. Outsourcing districts must continue to pay their share of unfunded pension liabilities for past employees – not pass those costs onto other districts that are choosing to retain their employees.
- d. Consolidate ISDs and increase ISD accountability. Streamline administrative and data reporting bureaucracies of existing ISDs into the smallest reasonable number of new entities, while maintaining more local operations for special education and vocational/technical programs that directly serve students. Eliminate ISD fund surpluses, with any unspent taxpayer funds distributed to the local districts within that ISD. Mandate popular election of ISD boards to ensure appropriate oversight of taxpayer investment.

4. Ensure good stewardship of taxpayer dollars by increasing school district financial stability and accountability.

- a. Adopt a two-year budget by July 1, 2011. To provide declining-enrollment districts the time to make informed decisions about local budgets and staffing, use prior-year student counts to allocate per pupil state aid payments (with exceptions for districts experiencing significant increasing enrollment). Begin school aid payments on Sept. 1 to align with the school year and reduce the need for school district borrowing.
- b. Expand options for local supplemental school funding, allowing local voters to exercise their right to make decisions about investing in their local schools. Such options should not undermine the equity gains made since the enactment of Proposal A. A cap on the amount of local supplemental funding that can be assessed should be set relative to the minimum state per student foundation allowance.
- c. Spend more than 85 percent of school revenue on direct student support, including but not limited to classroom teaching, counseling and social work, student transportation, student nutrition, student facility maintenance and sanitation, and other services that directly benefit the students of a school district.
- c. Insist on the timely spending of tax dollars sent to schools to provide educational programs for students. School districts should not hoard tax dollars in the name of “sound fiscal planning” by keeping them in fund surplus (to the tune of more than \$1.86 billion at the end of the 2008-09 school year). Providing more financial stability for districts will reduce the need for large fund surpluses.



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• **Fix Michigan's antiquated tax structure that has led to Michigan's decade-long budget crisis.**

- a. As a founding partner in the "A Better Michigan Future" coalition, MEA firmly believes in the balanced solutions laid out in ABMF's four-part "Michigan Comeback Plan" (www.abettermichiganfuture.org).
- b. Close tax loopholes & giveaways. Eliminate tax incentives and loopholes for companies failing to create and retain jobs, while requiring yearly performance reviews for all remaining tax credits and incentives.
- c. Audit government contracts. Reduce wasteful spending by conducting performance audits on government contracts and departments with an eye toward efficiencies— ensuring Michigan taxpayers are getting the most value for their dollar.
- d. Modernize the state's sales tax. Our current sales tax is based on the old economy; we must expand the sales tax to include services and luxury items to ensure stable revenue into the future.
- e. Implement a graduated income tax. Michigan is one of seven states with a flat-rate income tax. We must modernize our tax code to ensure fairness and equity, while offering a tax cut to 90 percent of Michigan families.

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