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Families don't need DPS retread

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While the state Legislature continues to debate whether Michigan taxpayers should fund a \$715 million bailout of the Detroit Public Schools, we must acknowledge the simple fact that DPS has failed academically and financially – for decades. We need to retire DPS and provide new and better education options that focus on Detroit schoolchildren.

Rather than create a new traditional school district to replace the failed DPS, we should liberate all students from this woefully under-performing district model and provide in its place a system of schools where performance and competition create high-quality opportunities for kids. We shouldn't create a new district that is nothing more than a DPS retread. Absent urgent and serious reforms, the new district will only continue the downward spiral of poor academic performance, declining enrollment and financial instability we've seen for decades from DPS.

In an effort to secure votes from Detroit Democrats for the DPS bailout, the legislative majority has agreed to nine of their 10 policy demands. Unfortunately, the Democrats still won't provide any votes for the bailout until they receive their final priority, which is to limit school choice and protect the new district from losing enrollment to charter public schools. Legislators should not give in to this anti-choice, anti-parent, and anti-student agenda aimed at protecting and maintaining the status quo for deeply entrenched adult interest groups. After all, since DPS has lost 75 percent of their enrollment in the past decade, haven't Detroit parents already voted resoundingly by fleeing for higher-quality and safer schools elsewhere?

If there is to be a new public school district in Detroit, the Legislature should consider putting Mayor Mike Duggan in charge. He's been vocal about problems in the current system and seems to have a sincere interest in helping kids. This approach, used in cities like New York and Chicago, provides clear accountability and local control. We support parents in every building in the new district voting on whether to remain in the traditional district or become an independent charter public school.

We need reforms that provide better educational opportunities and improve academic outcome for our students. First, we should expand school choice so students could use state education funds at the public or private school of their choice. 23 states, including nearly every other Great Lakes state, provide for full and comprehensive school choice, and Michigan is well behind. It is no secret a vast number of Detroit's political establishment – mayors, city council members, city administrators, judges, and even top DPS officials – send their own children to private or charter schools, instead of to failed DPS schools. Why should everyday Detroit parents be denied this same opportunity for their children?

Other potential reforms include improving early literacy; A-F letter grading that provides parents with meaningful information on school performance; aggressive intervention – including closure – of the state's lowest performing traditional and charter schools; teacher retirement reforms; school calendar flexibility; alternative certification for teachers; and prohibition of teacher sick-out strikes.

A quality education is a top priority for our citizens. Why should educational choice in Detroit be restricted only to the city's political and civic elite?

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