

April 21, 2020

Dr. Michael F. Rice  
State Superintendent  
Michigan Department of Education  
608 W. Allegan Street  
P.O. Box 30008  
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Dr. Rice,

We know that your responsibility to Michigan's school children has grown with COVID-19's threat to our health and economy. We applaud your and Governor Whitmer's leadership to keeping our kids safe, healthy and scholastically engaged during this difficult time.

With the passage of the COVID-19 stimulus package, Congress gave Education Secretary DeVos the ability to [waive protections](#) for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. At the same time, Secretary DeVos will have the power to allocate billions of dollars in funds to states and school districts with little accountability on how the funds are spent.

As advocates for Michigan's public schools, we're deeply committed to ensuring every student receives a quality education – particularly special needs and disabled children. Even before the pandemic, the education of disabled and disadvantaged children was at great risk due to the actions of Secretary DeVos.

It's tough in *normal* times for these kids to secure equal access to education. Consider Secretary DeVos's track record:

- October 2017 saw the [dismantling of more than 70 longstanding guidelines](#) for how schools should handle their duties under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- In the Education Department's fiscal 2018 budget request, [Secretary DeVos proposed cutting grants](#) to states under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act by nearly \$113 million – to the lowest level since 2001.
- She and her husband have spent heavily for decades to push for-private schools with little accountability for how they spend tax money – and for how they treat special needs and disabled kids.
- The [Secretary doesn't even seem aware](#) of the nearly universal findings that smaller class size is better. Last year, during a Congressional hearing, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said, “students may be better served by being in larger classes.”

Perhaps this world view comes from the Secretary having zero experience with public schools, other than attacking them.

We are not alone in our concern over Secretary DeVos's views and the actions taken by her. In [a letter sent to Secretary DeVos](#), the Alliance for Excellent Education, Education Trust – Midwest, and 10 other organizations asked the Department of Education to require state and local

educational agencies and local schools to give taxpayers clarity on how stimulus funding will be spent. They also urged the Department of Education to push state and local agencies to require local schools to ensure funds are spent on the “unique needs” of disabled and disadvantaged students.

That request was met with silence, and we have little faith Secretary DeVos will do what is right for Michigan special needs students. However, you can.

We ask that as federal stimulus funding is allocated to the Michigan Department of Education that you:

- Require local education agencies to spend stimulus funds in their schools in an equitable manner, ensuring students with disabilities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are not overlooked.
- Require local education agencies and schools to provide transparency on how they spend stimulus funds.

These actions would go a long way in ensuring Michigan’s most vulnerable students receive the resources they need.

It’s also important to point out that the Education Secretary is pushing for microgrants for students who are “adapting to remote learning.” On its surface, this sounds helpful. However, these microgrants can be used for students to attend for-profit private schools, the Secretary’s historical favorite. These schools underserve children with disabilities and often discriminate against them.

The U.S. Education Secretary might be willing to waive requirements for students with disabilities, but the state of Michigan should not dismiss the needs of our most vulnerable students. In short, we ask that you do what Secretary DeVos should do: ensure federal stimulus dollars reach our most vulnerable students and track spending in a transparent manner.

Sincerely,

Ralph Arellano  
Board President, Protect Our Public Schools  
Retired Flint Public Schools Teacher  
Flint, Michigan

Ellen Offen  
Advisory Member, Protect Our Public Schools  
Former Detroit Public Schools Teacher  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Riley Arellano O'Dell  
Board Secretary, Protect Our Public Schools  
Student, University of Michigan-Flint

Asa Zuccaro  
English Language Instructor  
Executive Director, Hispanic Technology and Community Center  
Flint, Michigan

Edward Goldman  
Professor of Medicine and Public Health  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Warren S. Williams, Ed. D.  
Emeritus Professor of Educational Psychology and Technology  
Eastern Michigan University

Enrique Rodriguez  
Board of Directors, Latinx Community Technology Center  
Flint, Michigan

Philip Zazove, M.D.  
Professor, University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Aurora Saucedo  
Community Coordinator for Latinos United for Flint  
Flint, Michigan

Elise Herman  
Retired Special Education Teacher  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Linda Sokolove  
Former Elementary Teacher  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Judith S. Williams  
Retired Spanish Teacher  
Washtenaw Community College

Barbara K. Chesney  
Retired University Professor  
Former Member, Washtenaw County Community Mental Health Board  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Thomas Murray  
Emeritus Professor  
Eastern Michigan University  
Jeff Gaynor  
Trustee, Ann Arbor Public School  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Katherine Edgren  
Former Team Member, The University of Michigan, School of Education, Statewide Technical Assistance in Special Education (STANSE) Project

Andy Frankel  
Third Grade Teacher  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Jerry Herman  
Retired Dentist  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Judy Williams  
Retired High School Teacher  
Taylor Schools

Regina Lambert-Hayut  
Cantor, Temple Beth Emeth  
Parent of two recent Pioneer High School graduates (one requiring a 504 plan)  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Bruce A. Sokolove  
Law Enforcement Consultant  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Rhonda Simon  
Retired Teacher  
Saline Public Schools

Elizabeth E Chapleski, PhD, MSW  
Retired Associate professor of Research  
Institute of Gerontology  
Wayne State University

Virginia Morgan  
Former Teacher and Retired Lawyer

Julie Jaffee Nagel, Ph.D.  
Psychologist  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Marcella Zorn  
Ann Arbor District Library Retiree  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Bill Wenzell  
Non-profit Development Director  
Grosse Pointe Woods, MI

Marcella Zorn  
Ann Arbor District Library Retiree  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Mary G. Adams,  
Retired Public School Teacher  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Robert Zorn  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Versell Smith  
Executive Director  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Ann Tomlanovich  
Retired Auto Exec.  
Ann Arbor, Mi

Peri Stone Palmquist  
Executive Director  
Student Advocacy Center  
Ypsilant, Mi