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House Dems Decry Unilateral, Inadequate DPS Legislation

LANSING – House GOP rejects bipartisanship, fails Detroit children and teachers.

House Democrats expressed their anger and disappointment today after the passage of bills failed to help children in Detroit Public Schools. The legislation fails to make reforms that will help kids succeed, instead focusing on state-controlled micromanagement, prioritizing charter schools and punishing the teachers union.

“We all agree that the state needs to take responsibility and fix the issues in DPS,” said state Representative Brian Banks (D-Detroit), chairman of the Detroit Caucus. “That’s why I’m baffled that House Republicans chose to reject our input and continue on the same course that got us here in the first place.”

Earlier this year, the Senate agreed to a bipartisan deal to help DPS through meaningful reforms. Lawmakers had agreed to the creation of a Detroit Education Commission, which would oversee the opening and closing of all public schools in Detroit — traditional and charter. The commission also had support from Gov. Rick Snyder and Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan. However, House Republicans instead opted to expand state control, punish teachers and underfund financial assistance to repair the financial damage the state emergency managers caused.

“House Republicans had a chance to work in bipartisan fashion with Senate Republicans and Democrats in both chambers to pass a plan that would have had the backing of Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan and Gov. Rick Snyder, but instead they chose to pave their own path with corporate special interests that run for-profit schools here in Michigan,” said Assistant Democratic Leader Fred Durhal III (D-Detroit). “It was state oversight that focused more on cutting costs and helping corporate-run charters make money that got us into this mess, but House Republicans haven’t learned their lesson. Instead, this package of bills just gives us more of the same.”

House Republicans also saw fit to undermine the profession of teaching. They rejected an amendment to remove language allowing for uncertified teachers to work in the district and included language designed to attack the teachers union. As their only course of action after it was revealed that the district did not have funds to fulfill their payroll obligations, teachers engaged in a sick-out. The current emergency manager has promised that teachers will be paid as intended, and Detroit teachers are back on the job.

“It’s a shame that my Republican colleagues are more focused on punishing hardworking teachers who dared to speak out about the conditions of Detroit schools rather than on the need Detroit children have for safe schools and a quality education,” House Education Committee Vice Chairman Rep. Adam Zemke (D-Ann Arbor) said. “Instead of solving the problems facing Detroit schools and their students, House Republicans are using this crisis as an opportunity to further their partisan agenda. This is not a solution to any of DPS’ problems. It’s a disgrace, and we don’t support it.”

The House Republicans bills do nothing to address the problems DPS is currently facing.

“By rejecting the Detroit Education Commission in favor of more state-appointed control, House Republicans are not only rejecting a community-based, bipartisan solution, they are rehashing the same failed ideas of the last decade,” said state Rep. Pam Faris (D-Clio). “This plan doesn’t help traditional schools, or the students and teachers who only want to have the best opportunity to succeed. We’re irresponsibly throwing taxpayer dollars at this problem without actually fixing it.”

The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren formed on December 11, 2014 as an independent, diverse cross-section of Detroit leaders who came together to make recommendations to improve the city’s education system. Its first report, The Choice Is Ours, focused on how the state could help. Most of our recommendations were enacted. Now, the Coalition is focused on actions Detroiters can take locally to strengthen the city’s schools.

The Coalition’s leadership teams are made up of approximately 150 community members. The Coalition is led by six co-chairs: Tonya Allen, Skillman Foundation president & CEO; Rev. Wendell Anthony, Fellowship Chapel and president of the Detroit branch of the NAACP; David Hecker, president of AFT Michigan/AFL-CIO; John Rakolta Jr., CEO of Walbridge; Mark Reuss, executive vice president, global product development, purchasing and supply chain of General Motors; and Angela Reyes, executive director of Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation.

The Coalition’s 2017 report, Our School, Our Moment, is available at www.DetroitEducationCoalition.org.

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