



Dear Legislators:

My name is Zach Eckert, Regional Legislative Director for ExcelinEd in Action, the advocacy organization for the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

Our team works with state lawmakers and partner organizations to empower families, prepare students for college and careers, prioritize early literacy, expand innovation and strengthen school performance to name just a few policies we work in.

As you know, states across the country are developing their school reopening plans and guidance to local districts. Many of the plans support local decision making, so local leaders can determine the best steps for their communities as they reopen.

States that have already released some form of guidance include Indiana, Florida, Idaho, Tennessee, Missouri and Kentucky. Their goal is getting schools opened to provide all available options to parents. For example,

- Indiana's "IN-CLASS" guidance makes clear that schools should plan for 180 days of instruction.
- Florida's executive order requires schools to provide in-person instruction at least 5 days a week.
- And Idaho made it clear that reopening schools is a top priority.

We know there will be exceptions—as there should be—to accommodate local ordinances and health concerns. But these default plans to open schools guarantee that the state is doing everything possible to educate its students.

The package of legislation before you have the same goal: to keep education moving forward while ensuring there is flexibility for parents and communities to do what is best for their students. That being said, all of the bills before you today are a step in the right direction regardless of how or when schools open.

Michigan's Return to Learn plan includes numerous policies we believe are student-centered, equitable, and needed.

- School closures have impacted all students' learning, particularly those students who are on the wrong side of the digital divide whether through lack of access to devices or the Internet. The safeguards in place in HB 5910 regarding e-learning will ensure that even students who do not have the same access to digital learning as their counterparts will be successful.
- Further disruptions are inevitable, and HB 5911 recognizes this as it calls to expand Michigan's online course offerings so all students in Michigan can have access to the courses they need to become college and career ready. ExcelinEd in Action has been a leader in advocating



for more access to online coursework and we applaud states like Michigan who are looking to further expand opportunities for online learning.

- Flexibility around seat time and school calendar days is also essential to the new reality of students' learning environments. Like Indiana and Utah which both recently passed bills related to this issue, HB 5913 allows for Michigan to create that flexibility by expanding the definition of attendance.
- We applaud efforts to ensure benchmark assessments are administered within the first 30 days of instruction in reading and math thereby allowing educators the opportunity to make thoughtful decisions and direct support and resources to schools and students in the most need. For students who show gaps in reading and math, the results of the benchmark assessments should be used to provide specific interventions to address those gaps, either before, during, or after school.

In sum, this is a commonsense package of legislation for Michigan that aims to give local leaders and students more flexibility.

Sincerely,

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