

July 15, 2020

Majority Leader Mike Shirkey
Democratic Leader Jim Ananich
Chairwoman Lana Theis
Chairman Wayne Schmidt
P.O. Box 30036
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Speaker Lee Chatfield
Democratic Leader Christine Greig
Chairwoman Pamela Hornberger
Chairman Aaron Miller
P.O. Box 30014
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Dear Senators Shirkey, Ananich, Theis, and Schmidt and Representatives Chatfield, Greig, Hornberger, and Miller:

As Michigan continues to address the profound challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical and urgent that clear parameters be established for the coming school year so that districts have the stability necessary to focus on students' physical, socioemotional, and academic needs.

Under current law, Section 101 of the State School Aid Act outlines the requirements for districts to be eligible to receive state aid. Each district must provide at least 180 days and 1,098 hours of pupil instruction. Further, if a district does not have at least 75 percent of the district's membership in attendance on any day of pupil instruction, the Michigan Department of Education must reduce the district's state aid for the day by the percentage of students who actually attend under that 75 percent.

In a pandemic, the way districts count days, hours, and attendance will need to differ from the way we have traditionally counted.

Many parents will feel uncomfortable and/or will be unwilling to send their children back to school during a pandemic for a range of reasons: their children's underlying health concerns, the parents' underlying health concerns, other family members' health concerns, or a general sense of unease about the current situation. Many of these parents will want their children to continue to be educated by their local school district or public school academy, but at a distance. Moreover, if we fall into phase 3 or below of the pandemic, we will once again need to educate children at a distance. We must have a system that permits a different form of counting during a pandemic than pre-pandemic.

We recommend the following:

- Given that some hours of instruction will take place for some students at a distance; that children, particularly young children, shouldn't spend the same number of hours in front of a computer screen as they would spend hours at school; that some students will still not be internet connected, especially in remote regions across the state and that it will be impossible to track as a result their instructional hours; and that we may have to "stay home" if Michigan moves back to phase 3 or below of the state's reopening phases for the pandemic, **the requirement to count hours in the 2020-21 school year should be waived.**

- Given that we will be educating some children at a distance during the entire year as a result of the concerns of parents, and that we may have to suspend in-person instruction at some point during the school year, **the requirement to count daily attendance in the 2020-21 school year should be waived.** This amendment in state law would also allow districts to shift between an in-person and a remote learning environment without having to meet a 75 percent daily attendance requirement, particularly at a distance.
- In spite of the need for flexibility in hours and attendance in the 2020-21 school year, **the minimum days should remain at 180 and districts should continue to be required to count days as currently in state law.**

These legislative recommendations are consistent with Executive Orders 2020-35, 2020-65, and 2020-142. They are also consistent with Senate Bills 873, 875, and 925, which are meant to codify the executive orders from this spring.

In addition, it is critical that the legislature determine the method for counting enrollment for the 2020-21 school year. Because of the enormous uncertainty around public health at this time, as well as the lack of clarity about the percentages of children who will be educated at a distance in any school district at any given moment, we **recommend that the enrollment (the membership in legislative parlance) of a local education agency (LEA) for the 2020-21 school year be established as the fall count of the 2019-20 school year. We also recommend that the counts for membership as currently required by law be suspended for the 2020-21 school year.**

These parameters are an important foundation on which to build, but are particularly important in the coming school year when health, safety, wellness, and instructional models are less certain than in typical years.

These recommendations will allow districts to serve children and families wherever they are and to provide instruction and support. We welcome continued partnership as we navigate this new landscape together.

Sincerely,



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Michigan Department of Education



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Michigan Association of School Administrators



Paul Liabenow
Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals
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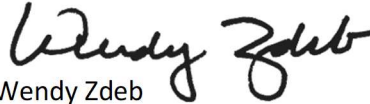
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cc:

Governor Whitmer
State Board of Education
Emily Laidlaw
Brandy Johnson