

December 1, 2011

Dear Representative:

I am writing you to reiterate the position of the Michigan Education Association regarding Senate Bill 618, which is currently awaiting action on the House floor.

The MEA continues to oppose SB 618, along with the rest of the Senate's so-called "education reform" package (SBs 618-624, 709-710). As a whole, these bills are a collection of unproven concepts that do not help our neighborhood schools provide a better education to all students.

Of particular concern in SB 618 is the unlimited expansion of charter schools through removal of the charter school cap. The premise behind charter schools was that through the innovation and creativity they could achieve, charters would not only be successful in and of themselves, but also help neighborhood schools improve. But that simply hasn't come to pass through our 20-year experiment with charter schools.

The research conducted on charter schools by independent experts – including Western Michigan University's nationally-recognized charter school researcher, Gary Miron – demonstrates that children do no better in charter schools than in traditional neighborhood schools. While some high-performing charters may outperform their neighborhood counterparts, that is the exception, not the rule – and the lessons they are learning in those quality charters are not translating to traditional neighborhood schools, either through collaboration or competition.

A cursory glance would reveal that a list of schools deemed to be failures in the early 1990s, when charter and choice experiments began, are still deemed to be failures in the eyes of most observers. The competition created through these experiments on our students has failed to produce any broad, meaningful improvement in the education available to all children or in the operation of school districts.

Since our support of the McPherson Commission's recommendations in 2002, MEA's position on charter schools has been consistent – increasing the number of charter schools should only come in concert with an increase in the accountability and transparency standards for those charters. SB 618's minor improvements in charter accountability do nothing to outweigh the unrestricted expansion of charter programs, often run by for-profit entities that siphon even more resources away from our neighborhood schools.

MEA urges you to vote no on SB 618. Rather than focusing on expansion of unproven concepts, we hope you'll look to provide the necessary support for all schools to provide what research says will yield the greatest results for our children: small class sizes, more and better teacher training, greater parental involvement and adequate resources, supplies and tools for student learning.

Sincerely,



Steven B. Cook, President
Michigan Education Association