



# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

## CHARTER SCHOOLS OFFICE

To: Mr. Thomas McMillin, Chairman  
The House Education Committee

From: Lawrence V. Wells, Ph.D.

Subject: SB 619

Date: February 1, 2011

Chairman McMillin and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Lawrence Wells, director of the Ferris State University Charter Schools Office and the chairman of the Board of the Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers.

Online Schools are an important educational option for Michigan children.

In a November 27, 2011, Detroit Free Press commentary Michael Van Beek, Director of Education Policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy recognized the importance of online education. Mr. Van Beek noted that “enrollment in online schools is growing nationally by about 30% each year.” He also stated that “digital learning is really about individually customized instruction, improved learning assessments and expanded access.” Through the use of technology, in the hands of highly qualified teachers, differentiated instruction can be tailored to meet the needs of each learner. Real time feedback on student progress allows teachers to use data driven decision making to help children learn.

Ferris State University is one of the first authorizers of an online charter school in Michigan, having opened Michigan Connections Academy last year. Many of you on the Committee and your colleagues in the House and Senate have visited the central location in Okemos already. You are aware of how Michigan Connections Academy teachers use “Connexus” the learning management system to document student participation within the teaching and learning dynamic.

Ferris State University and members of the Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers are committed to adhering to the Council’s oversight accountability standards and the requirements of the Law. The implementation of oversight and accountability protocols along with the required use of assessment data to drive instructional decision making is the

basis for our focus on educating all groups of children. Cyber schools are charter schools, and thus are held to the same accountability standards and the requirements of Law including those requirements of Law specific to Cyber Schools.

You as law makers know better than anyone that ensuring a quality school that provides student growth and achievement for all groups of students is required by law. It is also a historical commitment of our University. In a May 25, 1916 speech to the Michigan Pioneer Historical Society W.N Ferris, the founder of Ferris State University, eloquently said “my plea in Michigan – and it will be my plea to the last breath I draw, and the last word I speak – is education for all children, all men, and all women of Michigan, all the people in our states all the time.”

To ensure quality, charter schools must be vetted through a lengthy and detailed application process in two phases. When making a decision to grant a charter, Authorizers must consider:

- Resources available for the Cyber charter,
- Population to be served by the cyber charter,
- Educational goals to be achieved, and
- Applicant’s operational track record, if any.

Cyber Charter schools must include demonstrated improved academic achievement for all groups of pupils.

Contract renewals must include increases in academic achievement for all groups of pupils as the MOST important factor in deciding whether or not to renew the contract.

Cyber charters must comply with in all state testing, data and accountability laws.

All transparency and reporting requirements apply to cyber charters.

Cyber charters come under reconstitution and mandatory contract revocation provisions of law.

All SCHOOLS, including cybers, must post AYP and accreditation status on its homepage.

Three thousand eight hundred individuals have applied for admission to Michigan Connections Academy. Under current law only a maximum of 1,000 of these applicants can attend MICA.

In a survey conducted in the spring of 2011, 83% of the MICA families responded in the following ways:

- 88.6% would offer a grade of an A or B
- 92.2% of families would recommend MICA to parents not in the program
- 80% of parents were more satisfied with MICA than their previous school
- 88.1% of the children are satisfied with the MICA program

Your support of SB 619 will expand choice and offer increased learning opportunities for the children of Michigan.