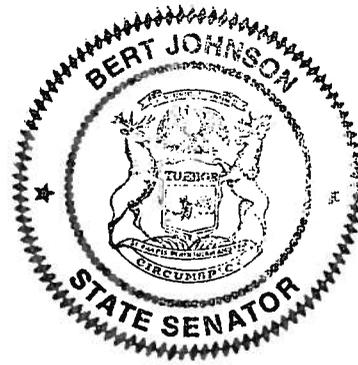




THE SENATE
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Dear Chairwoman Posthumus-Lyons,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the House Education Committee today regarding House Bill 4369, which would expand the experimental Educational Achievement Authority from its current 15-school Detroit-based model to a statewide bureaucracy.

In addition to the issues I will bring up in my testimony, I respectfully request that, before voting on this legislation, you and your committee members obtain answers to several important questions about the EAA, its leadership, its ability to educate children and its overall credibility.

On December 12, 2011, two of my advisors, both former public school teachers, attended an EAA/EAS Strategic Planning Session at Marygrove College in Detroit from 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. at the invitation of Dr. John Covington. The ostensible purpose of this session was to introduce the EAA/EAS concept to diverse communities and obtain community input on the design of what Dr. Covington called a new 21st Century curriculum for struggling students. Despite promises to reconvene the group to preview the draft of the EAA/EAS model, no such follow-up took place. In his remarks, Dr. Covington made several assertions about the EAA:

- The EAA/EAS is not a takeover of public schools.
- It is a partnership between the Detroit Public School District, Eastern Michigan University and Governor Rick Snyder.
- The goal is to transform failing schools.
- America's K-12 public schools are a remnant of an outdated system which does not fit in the 21st Century.
- The EAA/EAS needs everyone's best thinking and suggestions.
- It is an opportunity for the community to be a part of the reinvention of public schools.

Considering that this bill would make the EAA a part of the public school system and its own district, is it still fair to say that it is not a takeover of public schools? To what extent can the community say it has been a part of the reinvention of public schools under the EAA? Other than providing some students with iPads, what does the EAA envision as a reinvented public school system for the 21st Century?

The EAA began operation in September 2012, roughly five months ago. Recently, Dr. Covington claimed that testing showed 27% of students made what the district considers one year's worth of progress in reading, with 22% in math. Without context, of course, this means nothing. What level did each of these students begin the year at? What sort of instruction caused them to improve at that rate? How far behind grade level were each of these students? Were the reading and math assessments used in the design of the reform curriculum for each student at each school? Are we to rely on one Scantron Performance Series test to create policy for the entire

state and tens of thousands of children or is there value in awaiting MEAP and other test results over a period of time longer than five months?

EAA proponents discuss eliminating grade levels and meeting students at their current level. Does this mean, if a 9th grade student reads at a 3rd grade level, he or she will use a 3rd grade reading curriculum? What setting would this type of instruction take place in? What is the main instruction tool used in EAA classrooms, teachers or computers?

With such an emphasis on computer instruction, and considering that two months ago the EAA requested a \$2 million advance from the state to shore up a lack of computers for its online curriculum and to fix Internet glitches interrupting the computerized lessons, what evidence is there that this curriculum works? How was the curriculum created and benchmarked for authenticity and success in other school districts with similar students? What is the role of a teacher in helping students progress up to and beyond grade-level? What is the timetable, if any, for getting each student up to and beyond grade-level in math and reading and then implementing the Common Core State Standards for Math and English Language Arts?

What cost controls exist for the EAA? The 15-school version has already had its share of fiscal woes, despite the ability to break contracts and the fact that they were handed several brand new buildings built with tax dollars funded by the citizens of Detroit. Does the committee believe this system can expand from 15 schools to 50 schools and, even with the per pupil dollars swiped from local districts, maintain fiscal viability?

Finally, I would respectfully ask you, Chairwoman Posthumus-Lyons and committee members, to reference the attached article from the February 21, 2013 edition of The Michigan Citizen, entitled 'EAA is failing us.' I was not invited to the tours you took of schools in my city and district, but I visit them often on my own and without the preparation that clearly was done prior to your arrival. The sentiments in the attached article are what I see and hear from students each time I visit. Recently, students at Mumford High School, a part of the EAA, formed the Social Justice League to address issues they are displeased with. They wrote a letter to their principal and DPS Emergency Manager Roy Roberts that addressed concerns related to safety, failure to protect children with special needs, inadequate number of counselors, math illiteracy and overfilled classrooms.

Before voting on legislation to codify this unproven – and largely failed – behemoth of a bureaucracy into a statewide debacle, please consider the questions posed above and ask yourselves this: "Would I want my child to attend a school system as dysfunctional and unproven as the Educational Achievement Authority?"

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Bert Johnson
State Senator
District 2

'EAA is failing us'

Posted by: [The Michigan Citizen](#) Posted date: February 21, 2013 In: [Uncategorized](#) | comment : 0



Social Justice League President Timothy Horton and Rebekah Hunter, treasurer.

Mumford students take a stand against inadequate education

By Victor L. Walker

[Special to the Michigan Citizen](#)

DETROIT — A group of more than a dozen student leaders at Mumford High School met Feb. 7 to address what they call issues of social inequity in their school. They call themselves the Social Justice League (SJL) and have aligned with teachers, parents and community members to improve the quality of education they currently receive as part of the state's Educational Achievement Authority (EAA) school district.

During the meeting, students discussed a series of letters and personal testimonies they wrote to their principal Dr. Donnie Davis and Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Emergency Financial Manager Roy Roberts to address issues on behalf of the student body. Students say they are concerned about math "illiteracy," large classroom size, inadequate number of counselors, safety in the schools and failure of the administration to protect special needs students.

"We were promised equity, choice and reinvention by the EAA. In actuality, we received inequality, restriction, and regression. Last year, Detroit Public Schools gave Mumford equity, choice, and reinvention. We want DPS back," wrote students of the SJL.

Students describe how they are without books but go to school in a newly built \$50 million building. The students also say their appeals to Davis and Roberts have been ignored.

In a phone interview with Dr. Davis, Feb. 13, Davis told the Michigan Citizen he is "very supportive" of the students coming together.

"We encourage our students to meet and come up with creative ways to improve our school," he said. "There are a number of student-led groups emerging at Mumford, including a student council and Black caucus aimed at gaining a broader perspective of student voices at Mumford."

Davis says Mumford, under the EAA umbrella, is "definitely" providing the education the students need.

"We want to improve it. We have books in all of our classes and all the courses students need to graduate are being offered," he said. "We offer courses beyond what our students need to graduate."

Davis also described innovative methods of delivering instruction at Mumford, including online learning and technology that "puts students at the center of the learning experience."

"What we do at Mumford is a little different than it has been in the past. Teachers are involved but are not the center of the learning process. The students are the center of the learning process," Davis said.

According to Davis, some of the complaints the students have are valid and are being addressed.

But, he adds, "Simply complaining about issues doesn't help, especially when some issues are matters of safety and must be adhered to."

Davis describes Mumford as a "first-year school" and says he recognizes the challenges with educating more than 1,100 students. "How do we build on what the students have identified?" he asked. "I am one man, I can't do this alone."

Davis says he welcomes ideas.

During the meeting, students considered solutions to their complaints and will include them in a proposal they plan to present to Davis and ask that he address their issues related to academics, teacher quality and public safety.

Several students complained about EAA's computer program, Buzz.

"Most of us feel that Buzz doesn't teach us anything. The videos sometimes have nothing to do with the questions that we need to answer and are sometimes pointless and childish cartoons," said students.

Mumford teacher Brooke Harris testified before state legislators earlier this year about Buzz's ineffectiveness.

Students also said they do not feel safe at school and security is alternately too lax or too strict. SJL Vice President Tasha Fields says she is unsafe at Mumford and she believes security "doesn't address issues in a timely manner."

Some students said they are also afraid to come to school and describe Mumford as a "hostile environment."

"We are getting half an education in a complete correctional facility," one student said.

Another of the complaints include being "constantly watched throughout the day," being expected to wear uniforms and ID badges and being frequently harassed by security. In fact, security officers were present at the student meeting and, at one point, began to speak during the student's meeting.

Harris says her students deserve a quality education and to have their opinions and ideas heard by those in charge.

Harris advises SJL and allows the students to take the lead on the direction of the group.

"I want them to succeed. If anyone is going to lead this civil rights movement on education, it's going to be students," Harris said, adding she's concerned the students are not being taken seriously by Davis and EAA/DPS leadership. She believes fear tactics are being used to undermine the student movement.

"Students are afraid of punishment for speaking out or joining our group and staff are in fear of our at-will employment status," she said. "This is making our efforts to build alliances and gain more support inside of the school rather difficult."

SJL members believe students would be better served under the DPS system because the EAA has not delivered on its promise to educate them effectively.

Community activist and writer Tolu Olorunda, DPS Board Member Elena Herrada, Detroit Public Library Commission President Russ Bellant and Helen Moore of Keep the Vote/No Takeover were some of the community members in attendance who witnessed student testimonies.