



STATE OF MICHIGAN
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
LANSING

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**STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION STATEMENT ON
SCHOOL CLOSURES AND DEFINITION OF HARDSHIP**

On January 20, 2017, the Michigan Department of Education published the annual “top to bottom list.” This list was largely derived from scores on high stake standardized tests taken over the past three to five years. Based on this, and the School Reform Officer’s interpretation of PA 192, subsection 391(1), (2) and (3), the Office immediately announced 38 schools at risk of closure, all located in majority African American schools with 25 in Detroit.

Subsection 391(3) of 2016 PA 192 states, in part, *“If the state school reform/redesign officer determines that closure of the public school would result in an unreasonable hardship to these pupils because there are insufficient other public school options reasonably available for these pupils, the state school reform/redesign officer may rescind the order subjecting the public school to closure.”* Consequently, it is the intent of the School Reform Office (SRO) to examine each school to determine the “feasibility” of the closure based on “unreasonable hardship.”

The State Board of Education (SBE) is advising the School Reform Office to rescind ALL school closures at this time based on the following:

1. No clear definition for “Unreasonable Hardship” exists.
2. There is a potential for disruption and harm to students, as school closure is a state-created form of student mobility and a large body of research finds that student mobility can have harmful effects on student performance. This includes a greater likelihood of increased drop out rates¹, lowered achievement², increased chance of substance abuse³, lower levels of occupational prestige, increased symptoms of depression, and greater likelihood to be arrested as adults⁴.
3. Research that is supportive of school closings indicates that closures may be helpful if students attend higher performing schools.⁵ However, one of the issues in assessing school closings is whether there is sufficient stock of substantially higher performing schools.
4. There is great potential for negative effects on students where threats of school closure themselves can have a negative impact on students.⁶ Research further tells us that school closings can inflict trauma on a community and that students feel the loss in a manner similar to mourning.
5. Considerable changes to test content and delivery have occurred over the last four years and is likely to change again to address the newly authorized federal law, “Every Student Succeeds Act.”

¹ <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X05000700?np=y>

² <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740903001191>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5115879/>

⁴ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/development-and-psychopathology/article/div-classtitleschool-mobility-and-developmental-outcomes-in-young-adulthooddiv/22969866D2209F3D7AB261C7AA724799>.

⁵ <http://educationresearchalliancenola.org/files/publications/Bross-Harris-Liu-The-Effects-of-Performance-Based-School-Closure-and-Charter-Takeover-on-Student-Performance.pdf>

⁶ <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED510792.pdf>

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In order to determine what is in the best interest of students in targeted schools, the State Board of Education strongly recommends that no schools be closed this year in order for:

1. More time to be devoted to fully research the possible hardship and harm closures may have on students.
2. Governor Rick Snyder to reconsider and reverse Executive Order 2015-9 that removed the State Superintendent of Public Education's authority over the School Reform Office and authority to develop the list of priority schools.
3. The Michigan Department of Education and its education experts to be involved in school turnaround efforts at every level.
4. The State Superintendent to fully implement the "partnership" model to assist local schools.
5. The State Board to exercise its constitutional authority to provide leadership by further developing a means to measure "unreasonable hardship" that:
 - a. Is based upon evidence and research,
 - b. Considers the short and long term impacts,
 - c. Applies to subgroups of students including those with special education and/or transportation needs, and cultural and/or language differences.
 - d. Measures the overall impact on students,
 - e. Includes the financial and academic viability to the district,
 - f. Assesses the potential negative consequences for the students' home communities.

Furthermore, the State Board of Education would like to:

1. Make note of the board's [Policy on State School Turnaround](#) that was developed in May of 2015 and the action taken by the State Board of Education Legislative Committee on August 23, 2016.
2. Acknowledge that as a bipartisan body, the SBE supports SB27 and replacing 1280c with new legislation that aligns with the accountability system developed under the Every Student Succeeds Act's Plan while emphasizing school assistance and reform through MDE's "Partnership Model."
3. Emphasize that the SRO's initial handling of this matter created substantial anxiety, frustration, anger and distrust among the children and families at schools being considered for closure. School personnel are demoralized, and are struggling to continue ongoing reform efforts, which only damages children more. We implore the SRO to recognize its actions have substantial impact and ask that the SRO proceed with higher professionalism than has been evident so far.
4. Reiterate that any new legislation created to replace 380.1280c should restore the School Reform Office to the MDE. With intermediate school districts, MDE is currently the agent providing school reform guidance through its Partnership Model. It is in the best position to support change, demand performance and evaluate whether schools are able to educate their students.
5. Emphasize that threatened school closures in several Michigan school districts are a credit negative, according to Moody's Investors Service (MCO).

Adopted February 14, 2017