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Board of Education Legislative Position
March 16, 2021

The Board of Education and Superintendent of Schools stand in opposition to HB 1005, SB 423, and SB 413. Below is a letter of concern sent to all legislators representing the MSD of Lawrence Township.

Dear (Representative/Sentor):

We write on behalf of the MSD of Lawrence Township community to express our concern that legislation designed to enhance funding for charter schools and vouchers, coupled with new legislation creating education scholarship accounts will result in a significant erosion of funding for traditional K-12 public schools. Although it is hard for us to keep track of each amendment and the movement of language from one bill to another, our concerns are largely centered around the introduced language contained in HB 1001, HB 1005, SB 412 and SB 413. We fully understand that each of these bills has been amended and in some cases the problematic language in question has been deleted or watered down—at least for the time being. However, from experience we also know that all of these concepts will converge in a final conference committee report on HB 1001, the state budget.

As introduced, HB 1001 contained the funding recommendations of the Governor. We were delighted that the Governor's budget proposed a true funding increase of \$375 million dollars for traditional K-12 public schools. This amounted to a funding increase of 2% in FY 2022 and 1% in FY 2023. Unfortunately, it now appears that any increase in funding for vouchers, charter schools or ESAs will come out of the amounts the governor allocated to fund traditional K-12 public schools in the tuition support formula. And in all cases the percentage increases for these alternative programs exceeds the percentage increases for our traditional schools many times over. Moreover, if these increases in the alternative programs are taken from money that would otherwise be in the tuition support formula, the actual annual increases in the tuition support formula would drop to 9.3% and 9.8% during the next biennium.

This year and the next 2 years are going to bring unique challenges to our schools (and all schools) as we battle to recover from setbacks attributable to the pandemic. Students will continue to need remediation to combat learning loss, additional mental health support, and assistance with meeting basic family needs.

Now it is said that reasonable people can disagree on policy. While we may have our own opinions and stand in opposition to the growth of these programs given the unique challenges we are facing with the pandemic, any decision to fund vouchers, charters or ESAs is ultimately a matter of policy. However, we ask that you be intellectually honest and fund the increases in these programs outside of the traditional tuition support formula. That way we can plan and budget to meet the needs of our students and families without the worry of the funds being diverted to further alternative policy objectives.

We are proud of the strong relationship we maintain with our legislators, but believe it is in the best interest of the MSD of Lawrence Township community to support strong funding of locally controlled, traditional public schools as opposed to supporting sweeping legislation with the potential for significant impact to an already decreasing budget.

Sincerely,

Dr. Shawn A. Smith, Superintendent of Schools
MSD of Lawrence Township

Ms. Wendy Muston, Vice President
Board of Education

Mr. Richard Freije, Jr., Member
Board of Education

Mr. Reginald McGregor, President
Board of Education

Ms. Crystal Puckett, Secretary
Board of Education

Ms. Amy Norman, Member
Board of Education