



DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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The Honorable Rick Snyder
Governor, State of Michigan
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Gov. Snyder

When I began this journey nearly a year and a half ago, you shared with me your strong conviction that the future of Michigan runs through the city of Detroit. You said, "If Detroit is not improved, we will never be able to reinvent Michigan."

The conversations that followed centered on what you and I agreed was one of the most critical issues facing the city – the education of its children and how we saw this as the key to moving not just Detroit, but Michigan forward on a path to success. Understanding your commitment to Detroit's children, it did not take my wife Maureen and I long to agree that my leadership of Detroit Public Schools was not really an option – it was something that I needed to do.

Since then, many people have asked me why I took this job. It's simple, really. It's personal for me. I came from a background that could be the mirror image of a lot of these children – a single parent household with multiple mouths to feed and pressures pulling at my father from all ends. I know the impact education can have on a child because, quite frankly, education changed my life. I am where I am today because of my education and the teachers who helped me to grow not only my mind, but my character.

So, for the last 15 months I have been working on behalf of the nearly 50,000 students of Detroit Public Schools to execute the two priorities you gave me when I started: 1) fix the system so that our students would get the best education possible, and 2) eliminate the crippling deficit. I have to tell you, this has been the toughest job of my career and I've had some pretty tough jobs. But it's also been, by far, the most rewarding. We are making a real difference in the lives of the district's students!

However, I believe that the city of Detroit and Detroit Public Schools are now at, perhaps, the most critical crossroads they have ever faced. When voters go to the polls on November 6 to decide the future of Public Act 4, they will not only determine the course of the school system, they also decide on the future of tens of thousands of Detroit children.

When I took on the responsibility of Emergency Manager of Detroit Public Schools, I did it with the knowledge that Public Act 4 would provide me and my staff the tools to move swiftly to implement real reforms that would help make this district a leader in public education once again, and then return it to local governance. Now that Public Act 4 may be repealed, I find myself reexamining the impact that I can have on Detroit Public Schools under Public Act 72.

Having led the district under Public Act 4, and having experienced the push and pull of power with the Detroit Board of Education for the last two months under Public Act 72, I don't see being able to continue on the path to real reform.

With the authority granted to me as an emergency manager under Public Act 4, we have been able to accomplish in 16 months many of the things that have needed to be done for many years preceding my arrival. In May 2011, DPS had a deficit of \$327 million. I'm proud to say that deficit is now only \$74 million. I can also report that because of the difficult decisions that were made and the belt-tightening measures that were implemented, we have not only turned in balanced budgets on-time, but we have also surpassed our projections and had an operating surplus for the past two years.

When I started there were 31 people directly reporting to me, half of whom were contractors (including nine key people in academics and the entire finance organization), many who collected full-time salaries but only worked part-time. I have eliminated those positions and we now have people in permanent positions with clear goals and responsibilities. The result has been an elimination of unnecessary costs and the building of a solid team of professionals with deep roots in Detroit and a strong commitment to DPS students.

During my tenure, we have also put in place processes and procedures that were virtually non-existent previously. These processes and procedures assisted us in our review of all district contracts, and guided us when we rebid and renegotiated all agreements to the overall benefit of the district. The changes implemented, which were made possible because of the authority granted to me under Public Act 4, resulted in an immediate \$40 million in savings for the district.

The broad authority granted to me by Public Act 4 also allowed us to cancel leases in three separate office buildings and relocate all DPS departments onto the four floors of the Fisher Building that the District already owned. In doing this, we saved another \$2.2 million. This was necessary because the landlords refused to renegotiate in good faith. Even as important as



saving money, the move has brought the employees together and has allowed people to get to know each other and better exchange information and engage in problem solving.

At the same time we were focusing on reducing the deficit, we were working to create a stable environment for learning in the district which had not really existed for the last 7-8 years because in that time, there had also been almost as many leaders of the District. My goal with the reforms put in place was not to create shock to the system, but to challenge the system to make it better. As the saying goes, I'd be shocked if you always do what you've always done and get a better result.

Further, with the help of the strong team I put together under Public Act 4, we have revamped the education plan for DPS, implementing new and innovative ideas and programs, including – but definitely not limited to – all students having an individualized Learning Map, establishing nine self-governing schools that place control and accountability at the school level and placing technology in the hands of our students, 24/7, through our take-home Netbooks program.

Public Act 4 also provided us with the flexibility to implement [without political impediments] the new state mandate for teacher evaluations/appraisals. This year for the first time ever, we were able to make strides toward the ultimate goal of putting the most qualified teacher at the front of every classroom. I will tell you that this process was in no way easy or simple because it meant that some teachers would not be returning to the system. It might have been less troublesome for us to wait until the state developed its evaluation/appraisal model, but we didn't feel that we could wait even a moment longer. The children of this district and their education are simply too important. If there is anything I've learned throughout my career, it's that the most difficult things usually have the most impact.

Proposed changes to the constitution and the possible repeal of Public Act 4, as a result of the Nov. 6 election, jeopardize all of these reforms and the progress we've made and will leave the District without procedures required by the federal government to meet "Race to the Top" grant goals, which we believe we stand a very good chance of winning this year.

I truly believe that Public Act 4 has allowed me and my team of dedicated professionals to make significant progress toward turning around Detroit Public Schools and changing public attitude toward our school system. In fact, this renewed confidence is evidenced in our enrollment numbers this school year. As of Friday, Oct. 19, DPS had a five day average attendance of more than 53,000 students, and our fall count day numbers have us on track to not only meet but exceed our projected enrollment for the 2012-13 school year. Additionally, we know that 1,536 students have come back to DPS from Charter Schools, and 1,940 students have come to us from outside school districts. That's amazing reinforcement of our work and we want to make sure that everything we have done will remain in place without regard to a repeal of Public Act 4.



That leads me to the point of what may happen if Public Act 4 is repealed by Michigan voters, including the future of Detroit Public Schools and my own personal destiny. The District has been operating in accordance with Public Act 72 since Judge Murphy issued his ruling that the suspension of Public Act 4 revived Public Act 72. I have since listened intently to both sides of the legal arguments on whether Public Act 72 would be revived by a repeal of Public Act 4 and the discussions about possible new legislation replacing both Public Act 4 and Public Act 72, and I feel it is important that I share my thoughts directly with you on the possible effect this could have on the viability of Detroit Public Schools.

Since the time of Judge Murphy's ruling, the District has operated under shared governance. I have been responsible for all matters affecting the finances of the District and the Board of Education has been responsible for "pure academic matters." As Judge Murphy had the foresight to note, "one [cannot] formulate a bright line test that would permit the Financial Manager and the Board to peacefully coexist."

This shared responsibility for determining, policies, procedures and the direction of the District has resulted in utter confusion and chaos. The Board has refused to recognize the powers expressly granted to the Emergency Financial Manager under Public Act 72. And contrary to Judge Murphy's ruling that the Board "act with diplomacy, positivity and in the spirit of compromise," they have endeavored at every board meeting to undermine the efforts of me and my team to move this district forward. Plus, they have harassed, bullied and threatened staff for no reason other than to intimidate through fear and to dismantle this team of assembled professionals in order to leave management of the District to unqualified and/or unproven candidates.

Even more concerning to me, is the Board's apparent lack of concern for the academic affairs of the District. Not a single action related to academics has been taken up by this Board since Judge Murphy's ruling and the issuance of his final order. This is inexcusable since the District remains in the high-risk status it has been in since 2009, when the DFT President noted the Board "spends more time bickering among themselves than on education."

Unfortunately, things have not changed and are not likely to change at the Board level. There is simply no focus on the students or their academic achievement; there is only a battle for control over the entire district to achieve personal agendas not focused on educating our children.

If there is one thing of which I am certain, it is that in order to move this District forward, there must be a unified, concerted effort made by all parties. In the absence of unity between the Board and the Emergency Manager, this District will continue to falter and its students will remain underserved. Based on my recent experiences, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that under a bifurcated operating structure such unity will be impossible to attain.



As I have stated, I believe that in the absence of legislation empowering a single entity with the authority to operate the District, continued progress will be virtually impossible. Therefore, while my commitment to the children of Detroit remains as strong as it was when I began this journey, without the tools provided by Public Act 4, I do not believe that my presence here can have any further impact.

Although I would like to believe that the people of the state of Michigan will choose not to repeal this important law on Nov. 6, there are no guarantees. So, it is with a heavy heart that I feel I must take a step back and reexamine how, moving forward, I can continue to affect the lives of the District's 50,000 students if Public Act 4 is repealed. Whether that involves me staying on in my current role, I cannot tell you. However, I don't believe that to be true.

As I think about what I might do, I reflect on something that Nelson Mandela published in his autobiography, "I have walked the long road to freedom...and have taken a moment here to rest, to look back on the distance I have come. But, I can only rest for a moment for with freedom comes responsibilities and I dare not linger for my long walk is not ended."

I will have a decision/direction for you immediately following the Nov. 6 election.

Sincerely,



Roy S. Roberts

