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President's Message

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President's Message

Breathe Deep?

In his February 18th video response to the governor's budget plan, Mike Flanagan, Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction, asks all those involved in education in Michigan to "take a deep breath" when considering the budget being proposed by Governor Snyder.

In the wake of the threat to collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin, and the danger to teachers and students in Michigan if Governor Snyder's budget is approved, I am not convinced that deep breathing will help us when it comes to preparing ourselves for the changes to the lives of Michigan teachers and students that are being proposed by the State Board of Education and Governor Snyder. In a February 8th memorandum to the State Board of Education, John Austin, President, shared the following recommendations with Governor Snyder and the Legislature, that to ensure excellent educators (Priority 2), "Michigan's SBE/MDE has increased rigor and made newly transparent and accountable the performance of teacher preparation institutions, increased administrator certification and accountability, and now advance a continuum of educational reforms to ensure excellent educators in every building and classroom." This includes a plan to:

- Reform Michigan's teacher preparation institutions
- Revise Michigan's teacher professional development requirements to include professional development for all administrators and teachers, and link professional development to education and skills that increase student learning, instead of relying on the acquisition of a Master's degree or the current continuing education requirements
- Change the Tenure Act to accommodate the following:
 - Award tenure based on proficiency level rather than number of years of teaching
 - Require ongoing demonstration of teacher proficiency based on multiple measures, including at least 40% based on student achievement growth.
 - Make sure all teachers are equitably evaluated annually by qualified administrators, as required by current law
 - Streamline the process to discharge ineffective teachers
- Implement a 3-tier teacher certification system that includes enhanced new teacher mentoring, recognition and opportunities for increased recognition and compensation based on demonstration of proficiency and earning of 'master teacher' credentials, such as National Board Certification
- Develop state guidelines for teacher compensation that reward quality teaching: a statewide professional

salary and healthcare benefits schedule that supports attractive career ladders, recruits the "best and brightest" into teaching, retains the best teachers in classroom settings, reward teaching in high-priority schools, and provides opportunities for master teachers to play mentoring and instructional leadership role

- Implement administrator certification and training
- Public-private partnerships to deliver reforms (http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/SBE_Educ_Improvement_and_Reform_Prior_345231_7.pdf)

My concern with these guidelines is not that teachers will be held to a high standard. As someone who went through National Board Certification in the mid-nineties, I am not afraid of the idea of increased recognition for demonstrations of proficiency (though I am concerned with compensation based on one test or certificate alone). What I fear is moving to a system that "rewards quality teaching in high-priority schools" while not rewarding quality teaching in low-priority schools, as well as the adoption of a "statewide professional salary and healthcare benefits schedule" that is not locally negotiated or that disregards the rights of local collective bargaining units. Considering the current political climate in our neighboring states, we should be paying close attention to any language in any document that threatens to remove our voices from the conversations being held about education.

As my department head, Ray Ventre, an English teacher who has spent his career developing programs for students at-risk through accelerated high school and college levels maintains, as long as students enter our schools with inequitable preparation and varying abilities, we cannot mandate standardized outcomes, and we certainly cannot tie teacher effectiveness to student outcomes in those circumstances. I agree, and note that we should be working toward an educational system in Michigan that creates innovative and mutually beneficial rewards for students and teachers who seek excellence, regardless of preparation or location. I invite you to visit the Michigan Department of Education website and to contact your local and state legislative representatives about issues which are of importance to you and your students. I also encourage you to let your MCTE representatives and officers know how we may serve you as we meet the challenges of this new year.