The Education Trust–Midwest

MICHIGAN DEMOCRATS for EDUCATION REFORM

massp Leadership Lives Here. Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals

aft A Union of Professionals AFT Michigan AFL-CIO

MEA Michigan Education Association

MEMSPA The Principal is the Key Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association

MASB LeadStrong Michigan Association of School Boards

January 31, 2014

Dear Governor,

Thank you for your leadership in ensuring that all students in Michigan are taught to the same high standards needed to succeed in college and the 21st Century workplace. National assessment data have shown that Michigan's students have fallen behind their peers across the country. We believe that efforts to raise standards, and better support and evaluate teachers, are essential to improving our education system. We applaud your on-going support of these efforts.

As we head into 2014, we urge you to invest in the training we, and many other education leaders, agree is needed to realize the full potential of higher standards and educator evaluation. Indeed, Tennessee is among the states that have adopted these two mutually beneficial strategies – and now it is the top state in the nation for gains in student learning, according to new national assessment data.

We ask that you invest in these recommendations:

- **Investment in training on Michigan's Common Core standards**: Michigan's Common Core standards will require educators to teach students at much higher levels – and to help them gain much deeper skills – than ever before. For most teachers, even in the best schools, this will require significant shifts in instruction. Educators need training on the content of the new standards as well as the most effective ways to teach students so that they learn what the standards require. Leading states, such as Tennessee, have invested in training teacher leaders, who provide training to school teams of teachers. We support this type of training because it provides teachers with access to highly skilled teachers who they can turn to for assistance.

- **Investment in high-caliber, vendor-provided observation training**: Michigan's new educator evaluation system smartly requires that teachers' evaluations are based, in large part, on observations of their classroom practice. Research shows that there are key practices that are linked to student learning, and evaluators can be trained to observe them and use them to inform conversations with teachers about what's going well and how to improve. To ensure that evaluations are improvement-oriented, administrators and other observers should be trained by the vendor of a high-caliber state-approved observation tool that is aligned with the instructional shifts required by our new rigorous standards.

- **Investment in training on making final evaluation ratings**: Michigan's statewide evaluation system will require most administrators to do something they haven't done before – combine data on observations, student learning, and other measures into a final evaluation rating for each teacher. This is a smart move, as research tells us that systems with multiple measures of teacher performance provide the most accurate ratings. Therefore, in the second year of implementation, administrators should be trained to combine data from multiple observations, state and local measures of student learning, and other components – such as student surveys – into a final rating for each teacher. A consistent process and training for administrators across the state will ensure reliability and accuracy in how teachers are evaluated.

Michigan has taken important steps toward educational improvement in the last few years. We urge you to take the next steps to ensure our educators have the support they need to teach and lead the next generation of Michiganders.

Respectfully,

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