GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

POLICY BRIEF

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ISSUE: Conversion Schools (SB 620)

DESCRIPTION:

- Would allow a public school identified among the lowest achieving 5% in the State to be converted to a conversion school by petition of 60% of the parents or legal guardians of pupils enrolled in a school building or 51% of the parents or legal guardians and 60% of the teachers working at the school.
- Parents have 90 days after the school was placed under the SRRO to submit a parental petition to MDE recommending an intervention model to be implemented for the school in a redesign plan.
- Require a school district to lease a school building to a conversion school for $1 per year, provided that the contract would not unconstitutionally impair a bond, note, security, or uncontested legal obligation of the school district.
- Require a conversion school to use certificated teachers except as provided for a school authorized by a university or community college.

Position: Opposed

Highlights:

- Violates the constitution by denying a voice to individuals who reside in the school's jurisdiction.
- Allows a small group of individuals that may not have residency in a district to seize property paid for by taxpayers.
- Provides no ability to ensure election laws are upheld.
- Further erodes Michigan Public School Employee Retirement System.

CONCERNS:

- **Unconstitutional.** Would violate the equal protection clause under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution by allowing for a limited group of self selected individuals influence on school restructuring and denying that voice to others who reside in the school's jurisdiction, who pay taxes, and that are qualified to participate in the other school elections.
- **NO Residency requirements.** Eligible parents and teachers are not required to be residents in the school district, giving such parents and teachers greater rights than the rights of residents of the community.
- **NO Citizenship/Voter Requirements.** The bill does not require eligible parents to be registered voters in the school district of the public school, or even citizens of the United States, and are given a chance to influence and determine the governance of that school.
- **NO Election Standards.** The bill provides no ability to monitor and validate petition signatures. MDE has specified that it lacks the technical expertise, resources and capabilities to certify petitions in the event that a school attempts to change to a conversion school. Further, the bill establishes no method for determining who eligible signatories are.
- **NO quality standards.** There are no quality requirements to ensure that authorizing body or management organization for a conversion school has any experience or success in running a school.
- **Would increase retirement costs.** Conversion schools do not have to be in MPSERS system and as a result would exacerbate the increase in the retirement contribution rate.