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Public Statement: Debt Relief For Black And Brown School Districts Passes MI Legislature

With gratitude, Michigan Education Justice Coalition celebrates historic win for public schools.

LANSING - \$114.1m for school debt relief included in the Michigan Supplemental Budget passes, easing financial burden for schools and communities of Pontiac, Ypsilanti, Benton Harbor, Inkster, Marshall-Albion and Muskegon Heights.

For more than a decade, an overwhelming proportion of Black and Brown students across Michigan have been paying the price for a series of harmful education policies made by the state. But yesterday, after years of community members organizing for a fresh start, debt relief has finally passed thanks to those communities who never gave up on their schools and thanks to Representatives Joey Andrews, Angela Witwer, Brenda Carter and Jimmie Wilson and Senators Sarah Anthony, Jeff Irwin among other legislators, and now awaits the Governor's signature. In signing this bill, Gretchen Whitmer honors the legacy of her grandfather Dana Whitmer, the longest serving Superintendent of Pontiac schools.

Michigan Education Justice Coalition proudly supports equitable funding. **As we enter the holiday season, we are grateful to the legislature and governor for working together and listening to the voices in their communities. By rising above the initial promise, we exceeded expectations to include districts harmed by historic debt and put money back where it belongs - in the classroom.** Freeing up the general budget significantly moves these districts toward achieving smaller class sizes, recruiting and retaining teachers, fixing infrastructure and restoring Careers, Skill Trades, Technology, and Arts programs.

"Fixing the debt is going to help out everybody!" says Seven Green, a 5th grader in Benton Harbor. "It helps the teachers, the staff, the buildings and the students would get more attention."

Students can't learn when they are cold in the winter, when their schools are crumbling around them, and when their teachers are struggling because their salary doesn't pay them a living wage. While no district escaped the Great Recession unscathed, communities primarily serving Black and Brown students bore the brunt of these draconian decisions. From huge funding cuts to inequitable tax revenues and the punishing effects of school choice, the very districts most harmed by this series of policies were forced to take [emergency loans](#) from the state resulting in a crushing debt.

Michigan Legislators get an A+ from community partners for ensuring debt relief is passed before heading out to recess. Communities across the state, including Ypsilanti, Benton Harbor, and Pontiac worked together in partnership with elected officials to gain these historic wins for underserved school districts. MEJC proudly stands with [Student Advocacy Center](#), [We The People](#), and [Oakland Forward](#) to celebrate our efforts alongside our lawmakers for fixing the crushing burden of debt on school districts across Michigan. Students are relieved from this devastating legacy and will finally have a fresh start they deserve!

The [Michigan Education Justice Coalition](#) is a statewide network committed to advocating for equitable public education policies and funding to create safe and healthy learning environments. We envision a Michigan where public schools get the support they need, strengthening communities and making them better places to live for all of us.

About Us:

Elnora Gavin serves as the Policy Chairperson and Board of Trustees at Benton Harbor Area Schools, works as an organizer for [We The People](#) supports the Fresh Start Initiative in Benton Harbor and is a convening partner for Race2Equity and the co-founder of Peace4Life Student Organization.

Autumn Butler and Kermit Williams are Co-Executive Directors of [Oakland Forward](#), a nonprofit organization focused on civic engagement, education and outreach on developing policy through neighborhood leadership in Oakland County. Kermit served as a Pontiac city Council President.

Peri Stone-Palmquist is the Executive Director of the [Student Advocacy Center](#) and is a statewide expert in school discipline and the educational rights of homeless children and youth.



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