

March 10, 2019

Chair Hornberger and Members of the Education Committee:

House Bill 4206 (H-2) would allow the Department of Education, with the approval of the Interim Superintendent Alles, to count as hours and days of pupil instruction the days instruction was not provided during the period for which the Governor had declared a state of emergency. I write to oppose this proposed legislation.

The language in our collective bargaining agreement says that days legally required will be made up. My quick review of contracts in neighboring districts convinced me this was common language. By enacting this legislation as presented in the (H-2) substitute, you will cancel school, not because the weather is unsafe, but to avoid inconvenience. This legislation does not allow local school districts, many of which have already many plans to make up some of the days missed this year, to determine whether to accept these cancelled days or if our students are best served if the days are made up. That determination will be made for us under this bill.

Serving on the Education Committee, I am sure you understand that learning opens the world to children and young people. Nowhere is learning so likely to happen as in the classroom with a talented teacher. This winter has been incredibly disruptive and districts across Michigan have missed many days due to poor weather. In St. Johns, we have missed 13 scheduled days and the daily flow of school has been consistently interrupted. However, the answer to this challenge is not to say that these days don't matter and discard them. School districts across Michigan will generally be able to miss 9 days, almost 2 weeks, of instruction. That is enough. Before offering any more excuses, the time has come to redouble our efforts to salvage a full year of school with the talented teachers who serve our districts. As we made up the wrestling and swimming meets, or the postponed basketball games, our commitment to the importance of classroom instruction should motivate us to salvage the best year possible.

I am not saying that all districts should be required to make up all days. There are districts that have missed more than 20 days and making up all that time may create hardships. However, adjustments to the number of required days should focus on those districts and not districts needing to make up a few days.

In conclusion, an extra day in school is an opportunity for new breakthroughs in learning, and for the wonder of our world to capture the imagination of a young mind. In short, every day at school is a day that could alter a student's future. These days are important. Despite reasonable intentions, this legislation does not recognize the importance of one more day.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Scott B. Darragh, President
Board of Education
St. Johns Public Schools
darraghs@sjredwings.org