

# Michigan PTA 2021 Advocacy Asks

## Michigan PTA Takes Action Together to achieve the Education, Educational Success and Well-Being of Every Child.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and exacerbated the many inequities which have long existed within our education system. The inequities are unacceptable. This next phase of 'returning to school' is an important chance to ensure every child has every opportunity to reach their fullest potential, regardless of their zip code. The State Legislature, District and School Board teams, and educational professionals have the power to help ensure the educational success of all children and make every child's potential a reality in Michigan. Michigan PTA and our many members across the state advocate together, with one voice, to ensure that every child has access to a fair and equitable education in Michigan and across the United States.

That is why today, Michigan PTA is calling upon our Members of our State Legislature, school districts, and schools to:

1. Make needed investments in education for continued COVID relief to Michigan Schools to provide a safe environment and maximize education delivery for our children, teachers, and administrators across the state.
2. Include parents and families in communication and decision making at the state, district, and local school level as we continue to adapt and adjust our school's education delivery, content, education requirements, and resources in the future.
3. To remove mandatory grade retention component of the Michigan third grade reading assessment law, especially in this year of Covid-19 education hardships for students and educators in Michigan.

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## **1. Make needed investments in education for continued COVID relief to Michigan Schools to provide a safe environment and maximize education delivery for our children, teachers, and administrators across the state.**

Michigan PTA appreciates the education-related funding which the federal and state government has provided thus far in COVID relief packages. However, children, families, educators and public schools are still facing numerous critical and immediate needs, which must be addressed with additional COVID relief packages. Schools across Michigan must have support to address the safe transition back to school, the trauma of the pandemic and the myriad of instructional issues, including the effects of learning loss and the digital divide.

As such, Michigan PTA urges our state legislature to quickly pass robust COVID relief packages that addresses five key areas:

- Funding to reopen schools safely for in-person instruction and ensure the education of all students and educators;
- Increased support for Title I and dedicated IDEA funding;
- Dedicated funding for remote learning;
- Additional resources for family engagement in education; and
- Increased funding for child nutrition programs.

To encourage improvement in student education across the state we ask the Michigan legislature to:

- SUPPORT - \$250 million in FY21 supplemental for "student recovery services." Research-based best practices to support academic recovery funding.
- SUPPORT - \$1.5 million from Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund for MI Center for Education Research & Implementation (MCERI) to lead the replication and scaling of best practices in instruction, administration, and student support, beginning first with the recommendations of the state's COVID-1 Student Recovery Advisory Council.

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## **2. Include parents and families in communication and decision-making at the state, district, and local school levels as we continue to adapt and adjust our schools' education delivery, content, education requirements, and resources in the future.**

The Michigan Legislature, school districts and school staff need to connect and build positive relationships with parents to effectively engage parents in improving school education programs and activities. First, it is essential for school staff, parents, and community partners to recognize the advantages of working together to guide children's education and learning. The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting changes due to school shutdowns brought the need for **timely parent involvement and communication in the decision-making process** for our schools and children's education.

The Michigan Department of Education has been promoting a [Parent Engagement Took Kit](#), last updated 9/29/2015, with detailed information for improving parent, school staff, district information communication and parent engagement. A key item is "Developing a parent engagement policy or plan does not have to be a complex activity. There are many ways and tools to accomplish the task. However, the plan you ultimately develop should be a true reflection of your school's/district's commitment to collaborate with all parents and families to increase the academic achievement and success of all children."

The Michigan PTA urges our state legislature to identify programs and recommendations that:

- Have all state education committees and tasks forces identify a parent engagement process and activities. Reach out to state parent organizations for involvement.

The Michigan PTA urges our school districts to identify programs and recommendations that:

- School administrators can enhance staff knowledge, ability, and confidence to engage parents by ensuring ample opportunities for professional development on effective parent engagement strategies. Identify parent engagement policies and communication at the district level.
- School staff can be given dedicated time to plan and organize parent-friendly activities and events.

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*For the purposes of this document, the word parent is used to refer to the adult primary caregiver(s) of a child's basic needs (e.g., feeding, safety). This includes biological parents; other biological relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or siblings; and non-biological parents such as adoptive, foster, or stepparents. Parents guide the child's upbringing, which includes the interaction processes between parent and child that contribute to the child's emotional and social development.*

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## 3. To remove the mandatory grade retention component of the Michigan third grade reading assessment law<sup>1</sup> for 2020-21, especially in this year of Covid-19 education hardships for students and educators in Michigan.

Schools in Michigan completely shut down in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our schools, educators, administration, families, and students navigated the changes in education with hardworking, positive intentions. Lives have already been upended this year and education systems have been significantly disrupted. Children should not be retained in the third grade if they do not meet the required standards in the Michigan Third Grade Reading Law. Do not penalize children, families, and our educators for circumstances beyond their control.

The Michigan PTA asks that the Michigan Legislature:

- Remove the mandatory grade retention component of the Michigan third grade reading assessment law for 2020-21.
- Support reading assessments as tools for educators, administrators, and families for identifying how students are performing and in development of education planning for children.
- Recently bills have been introduced that impact this issue:
  - [Senate Bill 199, introduced by Senator Dayna Polehanki](#) on March 4, 2021, in working to remove the mandatory grade retention from the third-grade reading assessment.
  - [SB 261, introduced by Senator Kevin Daley](#), on March 18, 2021. To suspend for the 2020-21 school year portions of the Michigan merit examination. Education: examinations; administration of portions of the Michigan merit examination; suspend for the 2020-2021 school year. Amends sec. 1279g of [1976 PA 451](#) (MCL [380.1279g](#)) & adds secs. 1279i & 1279j. TIE BAR WITH: [SB 0263'21](#), [SB 0267'21](#), [SB 0266'21](#), [SB 0260'21](#), [SB 0056'21](#), [SB 0262'21](#), [SB 0268'21](#), [SB 0264'21](#), [SB 0057'21](#), [SB 0265'21](#)
  - [House Bill 4310, introduced by Matt Koleszar](#) on February 23, 2021. To amend the third grade reading mandatory retention.
  - [House Bill 4574](#), introduced by [Nate Shannon](#) on March 24, 2021. Education: elementary; third grade reading law; amend. Amends sec. 1280f of [1976 PA 451](#) (MCL [380.1280f](#)).
- Third grade students will be taking an annual summative reading assessment test in April, which could result in excessive retention. From the great amount of activity in the Legislature, we appreciate that this issue is a priority for Michigan State Representatives and Senators. We request they work quickly and cooperatively to pass a bill to remove the mandatory grade retention component of the Michigan third grade reading assessment law for 2020-21 school year. We urge our legislature to focus on eliminating the retention component swiftly, with bipartisan support, to benefit our third-grade children.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org/third-grade-reading/>