

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Monday, October 18, 2021

## Michigan Education Organizations Issue Joint Statement Calling for Civility in Board Rooms and Classrooms

As partners in public education, several major statewide education organizations – AFT Michigan, Michigan Association of School Boards, Michigan Association of Superintendents and Administrators, Michigan Education Association, Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators and Middle Cities Education Association – are calling on the public to stand together against angry rhetoric, provocative threats and harassment of school board members and educators at school board meetings, online and in local communities.

Let's be clear: we support and cherish the right to free speech and the individual rights of everyone to engage in local control of our schools. However, that must be done in a civil and constructive way, not only because it's the right thing to do in our society, but it's also the right example to set for our children.

Threats and vitriol – often based upon false information – are creating a wholly unjustifiable disturbance to everyone's efforts in the education community to promote a safe, quality public education for Michigan students.

This is especially true of efforts to undermine local health and safety protocols designed to protect students, school employees and communities during the pandemic. From across the nation, we hear almost daily impassioned testimony from the loved ones of school-aged COVID victims who say, "I wish I had taken this virus seriously." It is our duty to provide a safe and healthy environment for everyone.

Beyond the pandemic, some have used school board's public comment periods as an opportunity to voice opposition to honesty in education, including calls to censor educators from unvarnished discussion about our history. Educators have an obligation to provide an age-appropriate, fact-based education that fosters the critical thinking skills to succeed in a complex world.

Rather than respectfully raise opinions, behavior has escalated into bullying of public school employees, parents, and unpaid elected officials that want only to accomplish good things for kids. Michiganders have faced adversity and disagreements before, but the common denominator to overcoming division has always been – and must continue to be – the well-being of our youth.



The signatories to this statement condemn recent behavior being witnessed against our members, public school employees, and constituents of our local communities. The anger and outrage faced by school boards and educators have hindered their ability to maintain order in business meetings and school buildings alike.

Due to increasing “breach of peace” incidents and the need for public safety assistance, we call upon parents, community members and leaders to set aside personal political views and help maintain order during school board meetings and at our schools.

We also call on the Legislature to adopt Senate Bill 689, sponsored by Sen. Dayna Polehanki, which would increase criminal penalties for anyone who assaults a school employee or school board member. A bipartisan signal against such threats of violence is critical at this unprecedented time.

We are confident that the vast majority believe as we do in civility and setting a good example for our students—and we call on that majority to not be silent, as some use these difficult times to promote division and controversy in our schools and communities.

We believe that elected school board members and dedicated education professionals should be able to serve their communities without the threat of harassment or violence. Civility must return to our public discourse; if not, the ones who suffer most are the students.

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