



STATE OF MICHIGAN



DETROIT
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Frequently Asked Questions About the Education Achievement System

What is the Education Achievement System (EAS)?

The Education Achievement system (EAS) is a new statewide school system that will assume operation of the lowest 5 percent of performing schools in the state of Michigan that are not achieving satisfactory results on a redesign plan or that are under an Emergency Manager. The system will work to transform them into stable, financially responsible public schools that provide the conditions, tools, resources, support and safe learning environment under which teachers can help students make significant academic gains. The system's initial operation will be in Detroit, where Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Emergency Manager Roy Roberts will create and publish criteria that will be used to place schools in the new district. The system will expand to include low-performing schools throughout Michigan.

When will this happen?

The system will begin operating its first schools in September 2012 after organizing during the 2011-2012 school year.

How will the Education Achievement System work?

The system will have the power to hire the best management and personnel to work in the underperforming schools that are transferred to it. Principals will be empowered to assemble their staff, hiring the best teachers they can find, supporting them in a multitude of ways to continuously improve student academic achievement and ensuring that as much funding as possible is spent in the classroom, rather than in a central office far removed from the school. Existing personnel will have the opportunity to apply for positions in the school. The mandate of the Education Achievement System will be to push 95 percent of resources down to the school level, rather than the current 55 percent that reaches local schools in DPS.

How will schools be selected for transfer to the system?

The initial group of schools to be part of the system will include some of those identified by the Michigan Department of Education as being among the lowest 5 percent of performing schools in the state of Michigan (39 of them are in Detroit). Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Emergency Manager Roy Roberts initially will create the criteria used to place schools in the new district to launch first in Detroit.

How will it be operated?

It will initially be run in partnership with DPS under the leadership of DPS Emergency Manager Roy Roberts. Roberts will remain Emergency Manager of DPS while at the same time serving as chair of the Executive Committee of the system during its incubation period.

What role will parents and the community play in this process?

The new system will place great emphasis on community involvement in its schools. A Parent Advisory Council (PAC) will be formed at each school to incorporate local feedback and direction in a way that is much more direct than was possible previously. As the school progresses in its improvement plan, the parent council will assume additional responsibilities for supporting its school.

How will schools transfer into and out of the EAS?

A school that enters the EAS remains there for a minimum of five years. After five years, an evaluation will be made of the school's progress, with input from the parent advisory council. If the school is deemed healthy and performing at the end of that period, the school can choose to remain in the system, transfer its governance back to DPS, or seek a charter to run independently. If the school has improved to the point it can transfer its governance, the Parent Advisory Council, in collaboration with the school principal, will play a decision-making role regarding what organization the school chooses to be a part of at the end of a successful improvement period.

Will all Detroit Public Schools come under the Education Achievement System?

No. There are many high-performing schools in the Detroit Public School system that will remain in DPS. However, the Education Achievement System model of greater autonomy and empowerment, continuous improvement and more community engagement at each individual school also will be incorporated into DPS and the central bureaucracy will be dramatically reduced in size.

How was the EAS established and empowered?

The EAS is being established through an inter-local agreement between Eastern Michigan University and Detroit Public Schools which will create an Education Achievement Authority. While both of these "parent organizations" were necessary to form the system, it is an independent, free-standing entity.

The EAS will have an 11-member board, with two members appointed by DPS, two members appointed by EMU and seven members appointed by the Governor. Five members of the board will make up the Executive Committee, which will be chaired by Roy Roberts and will be made up of one board member selected by DPS (Roberts), one member selected by EMU and three of

the board members selected by the Governor. The Executive Committee will select a Chancellor for the system.

Who will own the school facilities?

Buildings will continue to be owned and maintained by the local school district, even when the EAS has responsibility for the management of the school. The local district will remain responsible for maintenance, debt service and facility allocation.

How will school buildings be allocated among the district, the system and district-chartered schools in a fair way?

Buildings will be allocated to different management authorities based on the performance of the school being operated in each building. In every case, the system will collaborate with the district to ensure students are provided buildings which best meet their educational needs.

Is the EAS a permanent entity?

Yes. The EAS will continue to have the responsibility to facilitate the improvement of the Michigan's lowest performing schools.

How quickly will schools outside of Detroit become a part of the EAS?

Academically underperforming, non-DPS schools who are not achieving satisfactory results on their redesign plan as determined by the School reform Officer will first be brought into the system in the 2013-14 school year, depending on its readiness to expand.

How will this affect individual students?

Students will be free to move from one school to another regardless of what organization is responsible for operating the school. The goal is to increase high quality options for students so that they can find the best fit for them.

What will happen in DPS in the transition year prior to the 2012-13 school year?

During the transition year (2011-12), an assessment of need will be performed for each school, including assessing the current school leadership team and capabilities for autonomous management. All schools will complete a school improvement plan with the Emergency Manager.

How was the plan developed?

The plan incorporates expertise and lessons from high-performing school systems across the country. It was refined in consultation with K-12, higher education and business leaders at all levels, as well as with Detroit community members.

I am a parent. How will these changes affect my student?

The Education Achievement System is designed to make a series of commitments to parents. These commitments include:

- Ensuring that each child's school has a principal that 1) knows how to create a safe learning environment and 2) passionately believes that every child, of every background, is capable of success;
- Spending as much money as possible in the classroom – not on administration – to help students and teachers make dramatic academic gains. Detroit Public Schools currently spends nearly half of all taxpayer dollars for education on bureaucracy and management, with \$900 per student going simply to pay off debt. Because the system will operate on a very lean administrative structure and not be required to payout funds toward debt reduction it will ultimately seek to push 95 percent of all school funds to the classroom.
- Hiring teachers that have a track record or the promise of success, and then empowering, supporting and rewarding them to succeed in the classroom. Every staff member in the central office will be held responsible for supporting teachers in the classroom, and all employees will work under a “continuous improvement” model that allows staff to provide students with immediate help when they have fallen behind, by accessing a multitude of cutting edge national and local resources to bring them up to speed, regularly monitoring their progress and continuing this loop until each student achieves at dramatically higher levels.
- Providing students with a challenging curriculum and longer school day that will allow for more instructional time in core subject areas like reading and math as well as access to the arts, music and physical education.
- Providing every parent a voice in the future of their child’s school, including a role in Parent Advisory Councils where they can provide direct feedback and guidance. As the school makes academic gains, the parent council will assume additional responsibilities for supporting its school.
- Sharing local school performance data with parents so they can make an informed decision about how to get the best possible education for their child.
- Asking parents to agree in writing to play a role in making sure their children succeed in school.

What will happen to my child? Will he or she have to change schools?

The EAS will become operational at the start of the 2012-13 school year. At that time, if your child attends one of the underperforming schools in Detroit, his or her school will undergo a

change in leadership and a shift in teachers and staff. In some cases a better building nearby may be sought.

If he or she attends one of the high-performing schools that will remain in DPS, the school and school management will remain the same. A list of which schools are academically “high-performing” will be released to parents by the end of the 2011-2012 school year along with the criteria used to judge academic performance.

Students will be free to move from one school to another regardless of what organization is responsible for operating the school. The goal is to increase high quality options for students so that they can find the best fit for them.

How does this plan address the fiscal emergency in districts across Michigan?

The EAS doesn't directly address the financial emergencies in schools districts, though the creation of a more streamlined management system with more resources flowing to individual schools should remove some financial pressure on the district. Overall responsibility for finances still falls under the jurisdiction of the Emergency Managers. This plan focuses solely on the quality of education being delivered in the public schools. In many cases, poor academic performance was the root cause of the financial decline of schools and districts.

Will school safety be improved as part of this plan?

Yes. In the case of Detroit where the implementation planning is furthest along, Emergency Manager Roy Roberts is working closely with the Mayor to improve safety both within schools and in the areas surrounding them (e.g., giving priority to demolishing abandoned buildings near schools first, cutting oversized hedges on school approaches, stepping up local patrols, etc.).

Also, as part of empowering schools and school leaders, school leaders will have greater opportunities to establish unique school cultures designed to address the specific needs of the students in their schools. Studies have shown that a strong, coherent school culture is one of the most important factors in reducing incidences of disruption and violence in schools and creating a culture that enables high levels of learning.

How will Special Education be handled?

Schools in both the EAS and DPS will serve Special Education students. The goal for each school will be to integrate Special Education students into General Education classroom settings to the maximum extent possible using a collaborative team teaching approach. We will ensure that schools cannot turn away, and have no incentive to turn away, Special Education students, by providing schools with equitable funding, a centralized enrollment process (potentially leveraging the local intermediate school district), and meaningful rewards for schools for success with higher need students.

What evidence is there that this “system of autonomous schools” approach will work?

A number of school systems across the country have adopted components of elements of the EAS with impressive results. For example, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina, where schools earn greater autonomy as they meet various performance thresholds, is the only one of 18 large urban American school districts with a fourth grade reading score above the national average. In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, scores for white, black, and Hispanic students all exceed their peers nationally on average. In addition, in New Orleans post-Katrina, the Louisiana Recovery School District, which has aggressively chartered new schools and given greater autonomy to improving schools, has made more academic progress in its schools than schools in the local school district and schools statewide. The New Orleans model has also attracted many more students back into the public school system. Finally, since the New York City Department of Education decided a few years ago to empower principals with greater decision-making authority, graduation rates have climbed six points and scores on state and national tests have steadily improved.

Why does Detroit need this new entity? Why not just fix DPS?

The DPS system has many strong, successful schools with excellent teachers but the current structure is failing too many schools. While every effort must be made to protect and expand examples of success, new opportunities must be provided for students in schools that have not been successful.

This is an effort to mobilize resources and expertise for schools that have not received the support and guidance they need to properly educate their students. This is an effort to provide talented teachers and staff with more support and access to best practices that they need to succeed.

By reducing central office costs, distributing more funds to schools and effectively managing finances (including balancing its budget and retiring its debt), schools can get back on the path to improving academic achievement as quickly and responsibly as possible.

The conversation in Detroit too often has not been about education. It’s been about politics. This is about kids and how to do the right thing for them.

What will change about DPS in all of this?

The DPS central office will be restructured to become fully focused on supporting its customers, the schools. Every position at the central office level will be designed to support teachers in making significant academic gains in the classroom, which is a best practice central office design for high-performing school districts nationally. The DPS central office staff will be streamlined and right-sized in an attempt to push more dollars to the schools.

What will happen to the debt in districts when schools are transferred to the system?

A team, consisting of representatives of the offices of the Emergency Manager, Governor, State Treasurer and Superintendent of Public Instruction, as well as private sector experts is working on options for the existing debt. They are expected to develop a path to resolve this issue by the end of the summer.

What happens to labor contracts?

The system will be a new, separate entity and employer. Contracts for employees of schools transferred into the system will be negotiated with the Executive Committee Chair, who initially will be DPS Emergency Manager Roy Roberts. Roberts also will oversee contract negotiations with DPS staff.

How will all of this affect public charter schools?

Public charter schools already operate independent of DPS, so long as they continue to provide their students with strong educational opportunities. This will not change, and they will continue to be accountable to their current charter authorizer.

Because more schools in the Detroit system will be attaining levels of autonomy and responsibility similar to the autonomy and responsibility that public charter schools currently enjoy, more external resources will become available that existing charters can tap into as well (e.g., human capital talent recruiting organizations, charter incubators, etc.).

However, given charter schools are public schools, failing charter schools can be included in the system, as well.

Is anything being done to help students who graduate continue their education past high school?

An effort has begun to guarantee that all students who graduate from a high school in Detroit will have the financial resources to attend, at a minimum, their choice of a two-year college or career training school in Michigan. The goal is to expand the program to include four-year Michigan colleges as quickly as possible.

Potential funders have indicated that they are far more inclined to provide such support if all students have access to stable, financially responsible schools that create the conditions under which teachers and students can succeed. The EAS will enable such schools to exist.

Would this be a part of the EAS?

The scholarship program will be a non-profit organization managed separately from the system and will serve students graduating from Education Achievement System schools as well as other

schools in Detroit. Every student graduating from high school in the city of Detroit would be eligible to receive a scholarship to attend college or a career training institution in Michigan.

Where will the non-profit, foundation, and community support be focused? Will this initiative take away from resources that would otherwise go to DPS?

While the system is being developed, we will also be conducting local and national fund-raising in order to build a foundation of financial support that can be used to bolster all of Detroit's schools, including DPS schools. New funding will likely be coordinated by a local 501c3 entity such as Excellent Schools Detroit (ESD).

What will happen to existing school and school district employees?

Any employees remaining in the DPS system will continue to work under any contract negotiated with the Emergency Manager. Teachers and staff that are associated with schools transferred to the EAS will need to submit applications for roles with the new organization. More information about how this process will work will be developed and made available over the coming months.

Won't this just create another bureaucracy?

No. The combined EAS and district organizations will be much smaller than existing school districts, allowing for far more dollars to be spent where they are needed most, in the classroom.

How will enrollment decisions be made?

Students who attend schools that are transferred over to the EAS will automatically become a part of the new school. Families will have the choice to transfer to a different school if they so desire as well as complete information on the options available to them.

How long would the school day and school year be?

The school day and school year will vary from school to school based on the school leader's approach, but some will be in session for eight hours a day, 210 days a year, which is the typical academic calendar used by high-performing nations globally.

How will you ensure that teachers and students succeed in the classroom? Many existing public schools, including some charters, are not working, why will these?

The entire structure of the EAS is designed to empower and support teachers to succeed in the classroom. All employees will work under a "continuous improvement" model that allows staff to continuously monitor students so that it is quickly apparent if they have fallen behind. At that point, staff will be able to collaborate with other teachers and access a multitude of cutting edge national and local resources to re-teach content according to individual student needs, monitor student progress and continue this loop until students achieve at dramatically higher levels.

Teachers will also have more time to bring students up to and above grade level, given the extended school day and school year.

High-quality traditional public schools and public charter models nationwide have proven that students can dramatically improve. EAS schools will have many elements of high-quality traditional public schools and public charter models that research has shown enable students and teachers to succeed. These include a longer school day, well-trained teachers, a rigorous curriculum, school-site autonomy to make decisions necessary for students to succeed, sophisticated student data that reveals areas in which students need to improve early on and access to best instructional practices and research-based interventions.

How will you hold new and existing schools accountable?

The EAS will develop and publicly publish, in collaboration with top quality charter authorizers and other successful education systems, a set of objective criteria for identifying high quality schools. Performance against these criteria will be the basis for all decisions made within the EAS.

Will EAS teachers still have the right to organize?

Yes. Teachers will have the right to organize and will enjoy job protections, including protection from arbitrary dismissal. Unlike the existing system, the EAS is designed to empower teachers to succeed by giving them a professional work environment under which they will have the autonomy, support and empowerment they need to dramatically raise student achievement and close income and socio-economic achievement gaps. Teachers will have access to: timely and meaningful student data, access to best instructional practices, time to collaborate with others, mentors, time to teach and re-teach until students master content and skills, an institutional structure of continuous improvement that supports teacher growth, multiple pathways to teacher certification, timely meaningful professional development tied to student needs as shown by data, and pay incentives.

Will per pupil spending increase?

Though total per-pupil allocations will remain the same, a far greater percentage of those dollars (95 percent) will reach the classroom than are reaching it currently (55 percent).

Does each school in the EAS establish its own curriculum?

The most autonomous schools in the EAS may want to establish their own curriculum aligned with State curriculum standards, but a strong curriculum and set of instructional materials will be developed by the EAS in support of its schools. Schools that are “direct run” like traditional district schools will be required to use these materials initially.

Does the EAS Chancellor negotiate one contract that applies to all system schools or does each school have a separate contract?

The chancellor will negotiate one agreement with teachers and staff. The school leader will make hiring decisions locally based on student needs, facilitated by a human resource system in the central office.

Does each principal have the final decision on his or her faculty or is the Chancellor involved in that decision?

The principal has the final say on faculty in his or her school.

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