



Dear Friends,

I was born and raised in Canton, Ohio. After graduating from college in 1974, I came to Michigan to take a job with an automotive aftermarket firm. Shortly after I arrived, I read an article in one of the major newspapers about Detroit Public Schools (DPS). The article stated that DPS was not keeping up with other urban school districts around the United States. Low test scores and low graduation rates were the main themes of the article. The article was disturbing because, for the first time in my life at the age of twenty-two, I was reading about a school district doing poorly. As I look back, I had just taken it for granted that all school districts did well.

Fast forward 42 years and things have become far worse at DPS. Of all the pieces of legislation that I have dealt with, the DPS legislation was hands down the most difficult. The problems were complex, convoluted, terribly political and financially impossible. Also, there were 47,000 students enrolled at DPS who had nothing to do with the condition that DPS was in. It is a fact that 10 years ago, DPS had 147,000 students. Over the last 10 years, DPS lost 100,000 students. Why? Many reasons. No one forced them to leave. Their parents took them out of the district of their own volition because they wanted a better education for their children.

In the early spring of 2016, it was revealed by the non-partisan Citizens Research Council that DPS was in debt in the amount of \$3.5 billion dollars. The district would go bankrupt in June of 2016 if action was not taken. The State of Michigan was in control of DPS for 14 of the last 17 years, and almost all of the debt was accumulated during the time of state control. The debt was also secured by the state. Something had to be done quickly because the debt was not the only problem. There were many more problems facing DPS.

DPS is the nation's lowest-performing urban school district. Only 7% of the high school students are proficient in math, only 5% in science, and two thirds of the students are not proficient in reading. DPS receives \$7,434 dollars per year from the state for each student. However, \$1,100 dollars of that amount is taken to service the debt. DPS spends nearly as much for its debt service as it does for employees. On top of all that, you have some employees at DPS who have stolen millions from the district.

Another problem is the geographical makeup of Detroit. Detroit has a land mass that equals 143 square miles. It is a city that was built for two million people, but only 675,000 residents remain. You could take the land masses of Boston and San Francisco and fit them both inside of Detroit. This problem is magnified in the following manner: In northwest Detroit, there are 3,700 high school students in 3 high schools. Acceptable. In the greater downtown area, there are only 1,900 high school students in 11 high schools. Not acceptable. In northeast Detroit, there are 6,000 high school students in just 2 high schools. Absolutely impossible!

***"I AM WORKING FOR YOU!"***

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My first inclination was to let DPS go bankrupt. No matter how difficult it is, there just comes a time when you have to cut your losses. DPS has been a problem for over 40 years. It was time for the state to get out. Frankly, the state was never welcome there anyway. On the flip side, I have always been a fan of local control.

However, when it comes to money, you must always think things through. When I did that, a different picture emerged. First, let us consider the debt: \$3.5 billion dollars. If we bankrupted DPS, the entire \$3.5 billion dollars would have to be picked up by the taxpayers of Michigan. Also, if we took it out of the school aid fund, it is estimated that the loss would be between \$2,500 dollars and \$3,000 dollars per student, per year. This would affect every student in the state. Also, as I said above, there are 47,000 students in Detroit that our constitution says that we, by law, must educate. I have no idea what it would cost to transport 47,000 students into neighboring districts, but I would speculate that the cost would be staggering. It is fair to say that this is one of those rock and hard spot situations.

To make a long story short, the Legislature appropriated \$617 million dollars from inside the budget for DPS. This was far better than paying \$3.5 billion dollars. This appropriation came from our tobacco settlement money from the Federal Government. There was no tax increase, and this allocation of funds had no effect on your local school districts. DPS would be reformed into an “old” district and a “new” district. \$467 million dollars would help resolve the existing debt. \$150 million dollars would be used as transitional funding to establish the new district. Also, a new school board was elected in November.

In closing, I have this to say to the new school board: The legislature has thrown you a lifeline. You can take this line, run with it, and succeed. Or, you can take this line, run with it, and fail. It is all on you now, and I sincerely wish you all the success in the world.

As always, it is my pleasure and honor to serve as your State Senator.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jack". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jack Brandenburg  
State Senator - District 8

P.S. Merry Christmas to you and your whole family!