

To the Chair and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

MEA supports the direction of SB 600-601 – greater flexibility for districts to design high school requirements that meet the needs of their communities and their students at the local level. The rigid nature of the Michigan Merit Curriculum needs to be adjusted to improve the relevance of high school coursework for students' future plans.

However, we are concerned by the argument that conflates requiring a course for graduation with ensuring that districts offer a wide array of courses to meet the needs of all students. MEA feels that through open, bi-partisan work and input from frontline educators, Michigan can achieve both rigor and relevance for students, whether they are on a college preparatory paths or one that involves additional post-secondary career training.

Much of this debate centers on how the Algebra II graduation requirement has derailed the academic progress of too many Michigan students. While college bound students need the skills that course provides, many others need to earn a high school diploma that prepares them for apprenticeships and other post-high school career training. Requiring Algebra II can be an unnecessary stumbling block for many of these students.

But this issue goes beyond Algebra II – it has to do with the very premise of local control and districts providing the educational opportunities needed in their communities.

Following the institution of the MMC, we saw countless career, vocational, agricultural and technical programs cut because students couldn't fit those courses in along with the new requirements. Many arts programs, while included in the requirements, suffered a similar fate – students couldn't take courses they were passionate about because the state mandates didn't give them the time and flexibility in their schedules. Creative electives that educators and students were excited about disappeared from course offerings because they didn't fit into the rigid buckets MMC required.

To be truly successful, we need a flexible curriculum that recognizes not all students are the same. One that embraces that BOTH a student on a college prep path AND one bound for further career and technical training equally deserve a **rigorous** and **relevant** high school experience.

We cannot do that at the expense of a well-rounded education. We must ensure that all students have access to the variety of courses they have now, without stumbling blocks created by a rigid MMC. We can find the right balance, and we look forward to being part of those conversations.

Together, we can address the central issue – providing communities, educators, parents and students with the flexibility to craft a relevant high school experience for every Michigan student that leads to a successful future.