



November 13, 2020

The Honorable Mike Shirkey
Michigan Senate Majority Leader
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Sen. Shirkey:

We greatly appreciate the acknowledgment of the hard work and sacrifices by Michigan K-12 school employees during the pandemic as shown by the grants for teachers and school support staff passed by the Legislature and recently put into practice by the Department of Treasury. As union representatives for many of these employees, we are acutely aware that our members were and continue to be on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis along with many others, and we know the intent of these grants is to recognize that fact.

However, due to some language issues in the legislation that was passed, many dedicated school employees are being left out of these grants. We do not believe this is intentional in any way, and are asking that, in the lame duck session of the legislature, these issues be addressed. Recent Treasury guidance cleared up potential issues regarding grants to some employees like bus drivers, counselors and social workers – we believe similarly simple actions can be taken to clear up remaining issues.

Legislative language for these grants was specific to K-12, which left out many school employees who are early childhood center educators (such as Great Start Readiness Programs), adult and ESL teachers, post-secondary special education (for ages 18-26) and other educators and staff who support student needs at every level of public education. Whether these employees work for local school districts, ISDs or higher education entities, they all did amazing work to modify learning opportunities for students amidst the pandemic and should be recognized along with their K-12 colleagues.

We are also receiving reports of school districts that are failing to provide names for groups of employees who are eligible for the grants, and others who are requiring proof of additional pandemic related duties that are not required under the law. We are working with existing guidance to inform districts that they are acting in error and to rectify situations, but we believe you should be aware of these issues so you can work with us to include as many school employees in these grants, as was clearly intended. Although we remain concerned about the different levels of grants available to teachers versus support staff, we know everyone involved wants to see the appropriated funds paid out to employees as intended.

We hope minor language changes can be made swiftly by the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor so that all deserving school employees can be recognized for their outstanding efforts and sacrifices during this pandemic. We sincerely believe these oversights can be easily addressed and hope that you'll work with us to accomplish their passage.

In solidarity,

Paula Herbart
MEA President

David Hecker
AFT Michigan President

CC: Gov. Whitmer, Sen. Ananich, Rep. Chatfield, Rep. Greig