

23 October 2017

Greg Gray
Superintendent
Brighton Area Schools
125 South Church Street
Brighton, MI 48116

Dear Greg Gray:

Growing up in Brighton, I started at Miller Kindergarten, progressed to Hornung Elementary, then Maltby Middle School, and finally BHS. I've experienced the entire Brighton Area School's education system, and I commend you on all that you've done and continue to do for your students. I can see why it would be anyone's school of choice—as it was for my parents in deciding to locate here—which is why I find myself writing to you today.

As an adult pursuing a master's degree in education at Michigan State University, I can look back at my education with a broader perspective and realize how incredibly lucky I was to attend school in such an outstanding school system. I want this same good fortune for every child. In writing to you, my goal is not to reduce the positive effect or success of Brighton Area Schools in any way, but rather to nurture surrounding schools and level the playing field for all schoolchildren, regardless of their hometown. The schools of choice program is hurting our students by subliminally promoting segregation and placing other schools at risk.

Just down the road, our neighbors at Pinckney High School are suffering. Attendance is decreasing by hundreds upon hundreds of students. As you know, schools are funded by headcount, and the impact on PHS will be profound if the migration becomes large enough. Loss of funding leads to cutbacks on activities, subpar teachers, and even neighborhood decline, as communities lose cohesion

when children within that district leave for other schools. No new teachers are being hired as it is, and current teachers will begin to be laid off. The programs are well on their way to becoming very unstable. Pinckney schools are in danger of shutting down.

This is an unsuitable learning environment for any child—uncertain education and little opportunity for extracurricular activities. Unfortunately for many, it's an unescapable reality. Transportation costs are one of the biggest factors restricting schools of choice. Even if a parent or student prefers a different school, if they cannot afford to travel there (or if they are unable to travel there due to parents' schedules, etc.) it isn't an option. So, schools of choice are not actually a choice for everyone. On top of that, whether it's conscious or not, this also promotes what is often referred to as "white flight," where white students elect to attend a different school district, creating racial segregation in our cities. This has already happened in Holland, Michigan, where now low-income Hispanic families have been left after white families fled. It is also currently happening in Detroit. Research has shown that integrated environments prove to be more successful academically and socially for learners. School of choice seems like a great idea on the surface, but when dissected, we can see the spiral of problems it truly creates for our students. In the end, it's really encouraging a culture of haves and have nots.

Again, I'm not asking you to lower your school in any way. Brighton Area Schools should be very proud of the learning environment they've created for their students. The goal is to provide this same experience for students across all districts. Because Brighton has the headcount, resources are being allocated to Brighton rather than to the schools in towns where the students actually live and whose parents pay taxes to support those schools. The entire program, while well-meaning, is having a hugely negative impact on those schools that are losing attendance to BAS, and is unintentionally biased. Thus, I am suggesting that the program be abolished; children should attend schools in the district where they reside. This will not revoke any funding

BAS has already received from school of choice programs, but will prevent overfunding. If you are unwilling to eradicate the program, I ask that you at least put a cap on the number of students permitted from each district. This also will benefit Brighton in the long run—eventually, the schools will overcrowd, meaning fewer resources for residents, and starting the vicious cycle all over again. School of choice programs are leaving children behind and damaging schools. It's time we think about what is best for education as a whole—not just in our community, but in all Michigan communities—and I do not believe school choice fits that vision.

Sincerely,

Chloe Becker