

# Letters: Bottom line: Charter school plan would be disaster for students | Detroit Free Press | freep.com

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Detroit Public Schools emergency financial manager Robert Bobb's announced plan to offer up to 41 schools to become charter schools is educationally irresponsible, fiscally impractical and morally contemptible.

This plan literally is like taking the educational futures of as many as 16,000 students and tossing them into the air, hoping that the winds of change will lead to their academic success.

Any charter school entity that is successful -- and the data show there are very few -- would be foolish to embark on an endeavor such as taking over any of these schools without having in place an academic plan that fits the culture of that particular school or schools. This would be consistent with what has plagued this district for years -- jumping into an initiative without proper planning and development for implementation.

On the other hand, for a charter agency that is simply looking to increase or establish a profit margin, this would be a golden goose. Should the schools fail, they would have the ready-made excuse of trying to improve these schools "on the fly," in effect eliminating or dodging their own accountability.

Highly qualified certified teachers would not submit to working in a charter school knowing that they are going to receive poor pay, little or no benefits, have no protections through just cause and due process, and would not be part of the state pension plan. As a result, these schools would be more inclined to staff unqualified teachers or teachers who have previously been rated unsatisfactory and simply need a job.

The *real* savings in Bobb's plan is not paying the 27% contribution into the pension fund. While this would reduce the district's incoming and future budget, it would do nothing to address what is at the core of the district's problem: the deficit.

For Bobb to announce this plan as he prepares to walk away from DPS calls into question whether he has admitted defeat in his effort to restore DPS to fiscal solvency, and is content to allow the children in DPS to become the victims of his failure.

I call on political, educational and community leaders, as well as those who truly care about Detroit's children and their education, to denounce this plan publicly and forcefully. This is not in the best interest of children.

**Keith R. Johnson**

*President, Detroit Federation of Teachers*

## **A blow to right to vote**

In response to your Sunday editorial ("Off the mark on city schools"): Robert Bobb's plan to turn 41 DPS schools into charter schools is indeed "off the mark." In addition to the reasons you cited, it weakens Detroiters' right to vote. Charter schools are taxation-without-representation schools. They take taxpayer dollars, but voters have no direct oversight. In contrast, DPS is directly controlled by voters.

If DPS or other democratic institutions aren't working well, the solution is to fix them, not to take away the right to vote.

We have a program, now in its fourth year, that promises to strengthen the right to vote by motivating families to move back into Detroit and make education a priority. It has a successful track record in Kalamazoo, Pittsburgh and other cities of increasing test scores, high school graduation rates and college attendance.

**Nat Pernick**

*Executive director The Detroit College Promise*

## **Cut union power**

I take offense at your blatant but underlying message in the editorial decrying the possible addition of 41 charter schools at the DPS. What a pathetic attempt to protect a teachers union that has done zero to help educate the children of Detroit.

While it is true not all charter schools are successful, this district needs financial and educational assistance to survive.

I believe the district needs to restrict bargaining to wages. No union has the right or knowledge to run a district under its rules. They are employees, not management. Their concern is with getting its members as much money and benefits as possible.

Union power needs to be removed, or at least curtailed and limited, and placed into the hands of those who really want to educate children.

**Bruce A. Sucher**

*West Bloomfield*

## **Emergency overreach**

Less than three months into his first term as Michigan's governor, Rick Snyder has turned our state into a dictatorship with the assistance of a Republican-led Legislature. The new "emergency manager law," masterminded and signed by Rick Snyder, will give state-appointed officials and school superintendents autocratic, tyrannical authority, while removing a large percentage of elected bodies such as school boards and city councils.

Michiganders certainly have a short memory to have forgotten what former Czar John Engler orchestrated through a Republican-led Legislature and excessive use of executive orders. Engler stripped the elected State Board of Education of virtually 99% of its elected authority and handed over the majority of power to the non-elected state superintendent -- a position currently held by Mike Flanagan, who also happens to be Snyder's education policy adviser. So now Detroit Public Schools emergency manager Robert Bobb becomes the first test of oppressive power by controlling both finances and academics, and the fate of 70,000 students.

Why should Detroit residents or anyone across Michigan believe that Bobb will resurrect Detroit Public Schools when he has done nothing but uncover chronic fraud and cheating for the past two years?

Bobb may have some solid and legitimate ideas to re-create DPS, but no non-elected bureaucrat is entitled to autocratic authority.

**Marcie Lipsitt**

*Franklin*

