



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
**DEMOCRATIC LEGISLATURE**  
STATE CAPITOL LANSING, MICHIGAN

May 1, 2020

Avondale Schools Board of Education  
2940 Waukegan Street  
Auburn Hills, MI 48326

Dear President Lang, Vice President Tischer, Secretary Johnson, Treasurer Down, and Trustees Johnson, Kakuda, and Lockhart:

First, thank each of you for your ongoing commitment to the education of the students of Avondale School District. As fellow public servants, we understand the long hours and dedication of energy required to advocate on behalf of people who have put their trust in you. Your work as members of this body is invaluable to the ongoing education of our students, especially at perilous times such as this.

We write to you today in opposition to the plan, as presented to the Board on April 27, 2020 at its regular meeting, to close Avondale Academy and outsource the district's alternative education plan to a fully-online program through Diploma and Careers Institute.

Avondale Academy is not alone in its financial challenges. We all understand the ongoing, systemic issues regarding the chronic underfunding of public education in our state at every level – in particular at the K-12 level. As members of the House of Representatives, we all us fight back every day against policy agendas that undermine the ability of public school educators, administrators, and staff to ensure our students achieve their fullest potential.

We also understand that the school in question is not a traditional school in many senses. However, as a facility for those students requiring alternative routes to success, there are huge questions looming over a shift from an in-person to a fully-online model, ones which we believe cannot be answered without sacrificing quality of education outcomes. While the considered vendor has touted diploma attainment numbers as a sign of its enormous success, it is well-established that the quality of the education on the road to that graduation is simply inadequate for an online school when compared with the in-person model. When considering the established studies on online-only schooling, it is clear that those students who require the most care to succeed should not be cast aside. We should be doing everything we can and thinking as creatively as possible to ensure the most positive outcome for these students.

In January, the Principal of Avondale Academy, Ms. Mindy Nathan, explained that the “smaller setting is often preferred by students who simply do not want to be in a large, traditional high school.”<sup>1</sup> She continued on, explaining that “other students come because they have failed some classes, or had some social issues, and other kinds of challenges too numerous to detail.”<sup>2</sup> For those students who decide that the online-only model no longer fits their needs, it is likely that they will be forced back into the large, traditional school setting that they failed to adapt to before, often in school districts other than yours. Avondale Academy is a savior for students such as these, who look to this adaptive, non-traditional model as one in which they can finally succeed.

Ms. Nathan further wrote to the community that the school is “focusing our efforts on social-emotional learning...to support our students’ ability to focus on their academic goals. In this program, they learn to manage their emotions, and in so doing, we expect to see improved academic performance, as well as better cooperative work in our increasingly project-based setting. As an alternative high school program, we must assist our students with behaviors that will move them forward academically, in career goals and in life.”<sup>3</sup> We question how an online-only schooling program could provide these students with these positive behaviors, even with the ongoing, in-person ancillary services discussed at the Board meeting on Monday.

If this coronavirus pandemic has shown those in the world of education and public policy anything, it is that teachers cannot be replaced by computers. While we are proud of and commend our community’s resilience in the face of this crisis, we should not expect these students, as we don’t expect students who do not attend an alternative school, to be fully transitioned to online-only education. Students, especially those who necessitate additional support, need individualized contact and connection with peers and school staff to thrive, both on a social-emotional level and on an academic level.

It is also critically important that we mention the obvious detrimental effects on teachers and staff currently at the Academy that this decision would have. Superintendent Schwarz admitted at Monday’s meeting that he had spoken to the staff at Avondale Academy before the meeting took place, and discussed with the Board the need to let many teachers and staff members go to accommodate this plan. While we appreciate the Administration’s plan to retain as many of those teachers and staff members within the district, we must object to any plan that lets talented educators, paraprofessionals, and auxiliary staff leave a school district that we represent without a real plan as to retaining their talents within our greater communities. Regardless of the Board’s decision, a better solution is required for these talented staff members whose careers are now in limbo.

We are not questioning the good intentions of the Superintendent and his staff who arranged for this proposal to be brought before you at your last meeting. However, we strongly

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan, Mindy, January 29, 2020. “Avondale Education Report 2018-2019.” [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M6mVAboBuvQ3TFq\\_EcWDcxDATdc6bWx1/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M6mVAboBuvQ3TFq_EcWDcxDATdc6bWx1/view)

<sup>2</sup> Nathan, Mindy, January 29, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Nathan, Mindy, January 29, 2020.

discourage the shuttering of a school in favor of an online alternative, given the plethora of evidence showing the detrimental effect of online-only learning on education outcomes.

Therefore, we ask that the Board consider exploring different options before voting to adopt this plan. We understand that time is of the essence given the nature and state of finances. However, we implore you to explore other avenues for ensuring students at Avondale Academy continue to be able to learn in an in-person setting while working with the school administration – and with lawmakers like ourselves – to push for better education outcomes and end the financial hardships that our public schools face.

We are grateful for your service to our communities and to our students, parents, and teachers. We trust that you will each vote in favor of the best interests of the students of Avondale Academy.

Respectfully yours,

In Service,



Mari Manoogian  
State Representative for the 40<sup>th</sup> District



Brenda Carter  
State Representative for the 29<sup>th</sup> District



Padma Kupp  
State Representative for the 41<sup>st</sup> District

cc:

James V. Schwarz, Ph.D.  
Superintendent  
Avondale School District  
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