



**A2Y Chamber Statement on School of Choice
March 23, 2017**

The A2Y Chamber asks the Michigan Legislature to enable and empower local school districts and intermediate school districts to combine efforts and coordination to minimize the negative impacts of School of Choice. This would look different in each community. In Washtenaw County it could lead to a framework where local districts work together to ensure base level funding equity for all districts in the County. This is critical for our business community because we want all employers to be able to attract new employees to businesses throughout Washtenaw County. This is especially important on the east side of the County with the emergence of the American Center for Mobility. Access to a world class education in any local Washtenaw County school district would be an invaluable tool to attract and retain a talented workforce.

School of Choice is a policy which allows K-12 students to enroll in school districts where they do not reside, taking with them the funding from the State of Michigan which would have gone to their local school district. Proponents of the policy argue it empowers both parents and children to make their own educational decisions. Without arguing the merits of the policy on individuals, School Choice has had a very mixed record for school districts and communities. In short, it has created a framework where neighboring districts compete with each other for students. Unfortunately this competition does not take place with districts on equal footing, and over the life of the policy it has helped lead to greater racial and economic segregation of school districts and exasperated negative impacts on local communities. Many well-resourced school districts located in wealthier communities have benefited from School Choice, with the opposite outcome for resource-challenged districts and communities.

In Washtenaw County there are nine local school districts. These districts vary greatly in size, demographic makeup, and resources. They also compete with each other for students (Chelsea is not open to School of Choice), and like the results statewide, they have very different outcomes. Districts like Ann Arbor Public Schools, Saline Area Schools, and others have seen an influx of students from outside of their districts, bringing with them certain types of funding. This usually adds a net increase in resources to those districts, but in some cases it can actually lead to the receiving district essentially subsidizing the education of those incoming students.

Districts such as Ypsilanti Community Schools and Lincoln Consolidated Schools have had the opposite experience. As students leave poorer school districts for wealthier ones, they take the very funding those districts need to provide services to their remaining students. Many times the students who leave are those with greater personal resources (or even simple things like access to transportation) to begin with, and those who remain are the least well off. This cycle increases existing inequities between our local communities, further segregating them along both economic and racial lines.

For all the reasons stated, The Michigan Legislature should act to provide communities with the necessary authority and flexibility to address the challenges posed by School of Choice.