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## Editorial: Give school choice a chance

State Senate bills expanding public education options should be passed by state House

October proved a productive month for state senators, with lawmakers passing seven of nine school choice bills along to colleagues in the House. All of these bills would give parents more options regarding how and where their child can learn in Michigan. The House should tackle these bills as soon as possible.

Sen. Phil Pavlov, R-St. Clair, chairman of the Senate Education Committee, and GOP colleagues have worked hard to create the legislation, and it shouldn't stall in the Republican-controlled House.

The Senate still has two more bills to vote on; one would allow a majority of parents and teachers to convert a school to a charter and another would require all schools with available seats to open them to students from other districts.

These bills have received the most pushback from school leaders and senators may be more timid in supporting them — especially in the wake of the recall of House Education Committee Chairman Paul Scott. At the beginning of October, the Senate passed one of the most important bills in the package — legislation that would lift the outdated cap on university-authorized charter schools. Lawmakers then passed six more bills that would remove the tight cap on cyber charter schools and offer more opportunities for shared time and dual enrollment in districts throughout the state.

Currently, Michigan only allows only two cyber charters to operate, with limited enrollments at each school. The Senate bill would lift those restrictions. The existing schools report long waiting lists, so this is clearly an option more parents seek.

Students at these schools receive all their school-related equipment and books at home, and then work online with qualified teachers as they complete their lessons.

Those who oppose expanding cyber charter schools are concerned that since Michigan's two cyber schools only opened in 2010, there isn't much evidence to prove how well they are doing. But administrators at the schools say enrolled students are excelling on state tests and in their coursework.

And a spokeswoman for Pavlov says they've looked closely at the strong record of cyber schools in other states and feel confident in expanding the options here.

The dual enrollment legislation would offer high school students, including public, private and home-schooled youths, more opportunities to earn college credits. They could take these courses earlier than they can now, and the state would cover credit costs for all students — not just those attending public schools.

Under the shared-time bill, non-public school students could take elective courses anywhere in their intermediate school district or a contiguous one. Schools are smart to participate in shared time as they receive a prorated foundation allowance for each student who takes classes in the district.

Lawmakers shouldn't delay passing this legislation. A recent poll commissioned by the Michigan Catholic Conference confirmed that more than 80 percent of state residents approve of giving families more education choices.

As taxpayers, parents should have additional options when determining the best way to educate their children.

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