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## U.S.

# Michigan Legislature Passes Package to Revamp Detroit Schools

Signals potential end to months of debate about how to fix the debt-laden district



Students enter the Cass Technical High School in Detroit. *PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS*

By **KRIS MAHER**

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The Michigan legislature approved a \$617 million package late Wednesday to rescue Detroit's public schools, signaling a potential end to months of debate about how to fix the debt-laden district which was set to run out of cash at the end of the month.

The package includes \$467 million to pay off the Detroit Public School's operating debt and about \$150 million to start up a new debt-free district. The Senate passed a set of measures late Wednesday that differed slightly from a House version, and the House swiftly approved the changes. Gov. Rick Snyder was expected to sign the measures.

School funding efforts remain stalled in both Kansas and Illinois, two other Midwest states facing big challenges.

"This work represents a fresh start with more money in the classrooms for Detroit's

students, career stability for Detroit's teachers, and fiscal accountability for all Michigan taxpayers," Gov. Snyder said in a statement. "This is a new day for education in Michigan's comeback city."

Gov. Snyder noted that the district, which has been under a state-appointed emergency manager since 2009, would no longer need such oversight. "Local control will be restored, so that new leaders for the district can be chosen this fall by Detroit voters," he said.

Democrats, who are in the minority in both chambers, wanted \$200 million to pay for the costs of creating a new district, and they wanted the creation of a Detroit Education Commission which would oversee the opening of new schools, including charter schools.

Instead the Republican-backed measures will include an advisory council whose recommendations will be nonbinding.

The measures would also make it easier for teachers to lose a day's pay for every day they are out on an illegal strike, another provision widely opposed by Democrats. Strikes by public employees such as teachers are illegal under state law, but teachers have nevertheless called sickouts without being penalized.

The Detroit Federation of Teachers, the city's teachers union, held sickouts during 15 days this school year, which angered some lawmakers.

Currently, teachers only face sanctions for striking if the district superintendent files a grievance with a state employment relations commission, which hasn't happened this school year. The new measure would enable school board members or the parent of a student affected by a strike to file a grievance.

A spokeswoman for the Detroit teachers union couldn't immediately be reached to comment.

Lawmakers acted as the clock on the financial situation at the school district, which has 46,000 students, was winding down. The district was expected to run out of money by June 30, putting its ongoing operations, including summer programs and teacher pay, at risk.

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