

NCTE/CCCC Black Caucus Statement on Detroit Students Right to Access Literacy

Last Thursday, April 23, 2020, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ground-breaking decision in *Gary B. v. Whitmer*. This decision noted that all children have the Constitutional right to a “basic minimum education, meaning one that provides a chance at foundational literacy.” Additionally, the decision acknowledges the shocking structural challenges Detroit students must face regularly, such as a lack of textbooks for students, few teachers employing a culturally relevant teaching approach, and crumbling buildings. It is our belief that the children and youth of Detroit’s public schools are more than deserving of a world-class education and do indeed have a Constitutional right to high-quality language and literacy instruction.

As a result, the NCTE Black Caucus has issued a letter to Gov. Whitmer requesting a change to the current learning environment of Detroit students and that she provide equitable learning environments and classroom settings for all students, particularly Black students within the Detroit school system. Since 1970, the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) as a group of educators and scholars has been at the forefront of teaching, research, scholarship, and policy work advocating for the continued support and success of Black students and Black language arts educators. We urge NCTE to issue a statement on the ruling and to support the Black Caucus in its efforts to advocate for and to protect the livelihoods and futures of Detroit’s children and youth.

We urge all Black Caucus members to educate themselves about this matter, to share the information with your networks, and to continue to work for the improvement in the teaching of Black students.

If you would like to get more involved, please reach out to:

Governor Whitmer’s office: 517-373-3400 info@gretchenwhitmer.com

State Superintendent Michael F. Rice: 517-241-0494 RiceM6@michigan.gov

State Chief Deputy Superintendent Sheila Alles: 517-335-8093 AllesS@michigan.gov

State Board of Education Executive Marilyn Schneider: 517-241-6984
schneiderm@michigan.gov

You can also text READ313 to 52886, and a community partner will provide daily updates and actions you can take.

For more information on this issue, please consider the following resources:

1. [Right to Literacy](#)
2. [Students in Detroit Are Suing the State Because They Weren’t Taught to Read](#), *The Atlantic* (2018)
3. [Judge says there's no fundamental right to learn to read and write](#), *The Detroit Free Press* (2018)

4. [Detroit Students Have a Constitutional Right to Literacy, Court Rules](#), *The New York Times* (2020)