

SHORT SUBJECTS

President Clinton proposes a voucher plan that allows low-income tenants to rent from landlords of their choice, escaping substandard and unsafe public housing projects. In July, the president vetoed a similar voucher plan for low-income students in Washington, D.C. public schools, saying the plan "would weaken public education and . . . shortchange our children."

Meanwhile, Michigan voters favor a tuition voucher proposal by 53 to 23 percent, according to a January *Detroit News*/Mitchell Research & Communications, Inc. poll. Kids First! Yes!, the group pushing the proposal, says it now has enough petition signatures to place the issue before voters November 7. **See related story on page 5.**

The National Education Association's legislative agenda would increase federal spending by 60 percent annually, according to a report by the National Taxpayers Union Foundation. The \$906-billion boost would mean a tax hike of \$12,874 for every American family, with only three percent of the new spending dealing with education. The report is available at www.ntuf.org.

Michigan's academic standards earn a grade of D-minus for their lack of clarity and effectiveness, says a report released in January by the Dayton, Ohio-based Fordham Foundation. The report notes the national average grade was a C-minus, and 21 states' standards are so weak as to be "irresponsible." The full report is available at www.edexcellence.net.

More Cleveland voucher students attend racially diverse schools than do their non-voucher public school counterparts, notes the Ohio-based Buckeye Institute. A survey of students in the Cleveland Scholarship Program found that 19 percent attended integrated schools, while only 5.2 percent of public school students did so.

An audit of the federal Department of Education for fiscal year 1998 was unable to account for nearly \$32 billion in expenditures. The department "cannot tell Congress or the taxpayers where the money went," said Michigan Congressman Pete Hoekstra.

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Governor: \$800 Million for Schools But Reforms Also Needed to Improve Public Education, Engler Says in State of the State Address

The theme of education took front and center as Governor John Engler reviewed a host of past accomplishments and outlined new proposals in his annual State of the State message before a joint session of the Michigan legislature on January 19.

"In the 1990s, one important lesson we learned was that the state with the best schools wins," Engler said. "I want Michigan schools to be the best, and I want Michigan students to be the best—in the world!" To achieve this goal, Engler said, "we

need full freedom, full choice, and full funding in Michigan public schools." Engler emphasized the last item as he proceeded to outline proposals totaling \$800 million in additional spending on education over the next three years.

Included in those proposals was an increase of the minimum state foundation grant from the current \$5,600 per student to \$6,500 per student.

The governor also called for new pro-
ENGLER continued on page 2



Governor John Engler asks the legislature for "full funding" of Michigan public schools. Government spending on education has increased more than 51 percent since Engler took office in 1990.

Poor Children's Education Doesn't Have to Be Poor National 'No Excuses' Campaign Highlights Detroit School

Is lack of money a good excuse for a school's failure to provide its students with a quality education?

The answer is no, according to The Heritage Foundation, a Washington, D. C.-based research and educational institute that in 1999 launched its national "No Excuses" campaign to highlight low-income schools that are providing quality education with fewer resources.

The nonpartisan campaign of self-described liberals, centrists, and conservatives insists that "there is no excuse for the academic failure of most public schools serving poor children."

A Heritage Foundation study by Samuel Casey Carter entitled, "No Excuses: Seven Principals of Low-Income Schools Who Set the Standard for High Achievement" focuses on several school leaders who are succeeding in their efforts to improve education for low-income students.

One principal that Carter profiles is Ernestine Sanders, the president and CEO of Cornerstone Schools in Detroit. Cornerstone is a conglomerate of three elementary schools and one middle school that offers over 650 students in grades K-8 a unique 11-month academic program.

"Cornerstone has blossomed into a privately owned mini-school district . . . providing outstanding education to some of Detroit's poorest children," Carter writes.

Despite rather modest facilities, Cornerstone students have performed relatively
NO EXCUSES continued on page 2

Collective Bargaining Curbed for Detroit Administrators But Measure to Increase Number of Charter Schools Fails in House

The Michigan legislature in December acted on two pieces of legislation aimed at effectively de-unionizing Detroit school administrators and boosting the number of charter schools that state universities can authorize.

Over the protests of lawmakers representing Detroit, both chambers passed a bill that would prohibit school principals and administrators in Detroit from engaging in collective bargaining activities. Meanwhile, the state House failed to pass legislation to lift the 150-school legislative cap on university-sponsored charter schools, despite earlier passage in the Senate as well as the strong support of Governor John Engler.

Under the collective bargaining bill, the chief executive officer of Detroit's public schools would have the discretion to prevent school superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and chief business officers from unionizing. Engler signed the bill in late December.

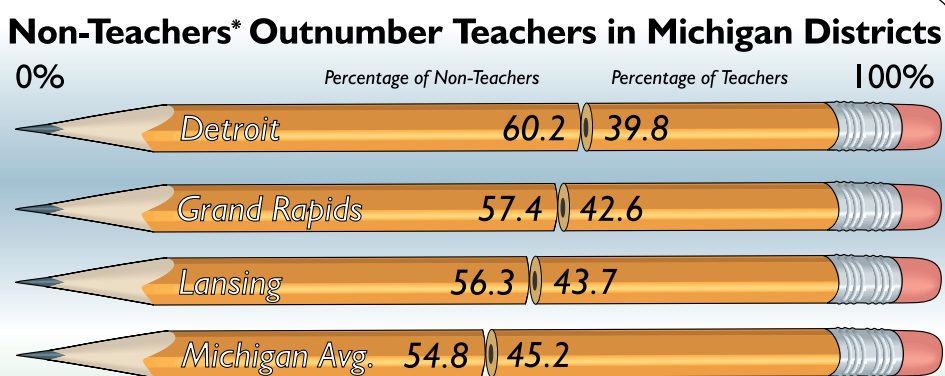
Detroit schools interim CEO David Adamany has been a vocal supporter of the bill, arguing that unionization among Detroit school administrators hinders efforts

to hold them accountable or dismiss them if necessary.

"This is an essential step for the reform of Detroit's public schools," Adamany told *The Detroit News*. "It will allow the district to place substantial additional authority in the hands of the principals to handle their

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Education at a Glance



Nationally, teachers comprise 52.1 percent of all public education employees. Michigan teachers comprise the lowest percentage of all public education employees in any state at only 45.2 percent.
*(Non-teachers include janitors, bus drivers, cooks, clerical workers, administrators, etc.)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Competition Will Break Education Status Quo

Thank you for printing the hypocrisy of the ACLU on school choice ("ACLU Hypocritical on School Choice, Critics Charge," Fall 1999). The Michigan ACLU's Wendy Wagenheim should be reminded why private security systems are bought for homes in the first place: because of people's feelings of insecurity in their communities. Are those feelings "fair" when the publicly funded police force should be protecting them? No! Neither is the "double payment" feeling fair when writing a private check towards education on top of property and sales taxes for public schools.

I love public education, but without competition in education and a continued bureaucratic monopoly, it will remain status quo!

Roark Pargeon
Teacher
CASMAN Alternative Academy
Manistee

Failing Public Schools? Yes and No

I compliment MER for its balanced feature, "Are Public Schools Failing?" (*Diverse*

Viewpoints, Fall 1999). My response is "no." In fact, most public schools are not only succeeding, but they now educate more students of all backgrounds at higher levels than ever before.

Now do public schools have an obligation to continue to improve? Yes. Public education is under increased demands for excellence, but our economy is stronger than ever, unemployment is at the lowest level in 30 years, productivity is at an all-time high, and crime rates are declining. These are to a significant degree the effects of a highly educated society.

Dr. Robert O'Brien
Superintendent
Huron Valley Schools
Highland

Public schools are not doing the best job at educating our children. Kids graduating from the public school system are often lacking in one major area: thoughtfulness. They have never been made to think on their own.

With my parents' help, I taught myself at home for the last year and a half of my high-school career. I learned more about myself and about life in that last year and a half. I learned discipline and how to figure things out on my

own, without the public schools' pressures and time constraints.

The public school system is not completely wrong and failing, but it is falling fast, and it is up to us—parents, teachers, and students—to do something about it.

Nancy Tyler
Jaffrey, New Hampshire

Enjoyable Read

My mother-in-law received the latest issue of *Michigan Education Report* and passed it along to me. I enjoyed reading it cover to cover. Congratulations on a balanced, informative publication. Please add my name to your mailing list.

Maureen Dalton
Manitou Beach

Send your letters to Letters@EducationReport.org, fax to (517) 631-0964, or mail to the address at the bottom of this page. Please include your name and how to contact you. MER reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and clarity.

Engler

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grams to provide public school teachers with laptop computers and \$1,000 bonuses to employees at elementary schools whose students do well on state assessment tests or make improvements in scores.

But new money for education should come with new expectations for school performance, Engler warned.

"I've often said that money alone is not the answer," he said. "The answer is fund-

mastered reading, I propose that this legislature require summer school in an effort to save the child," Engler said. "Failure is unacceptable. Every child must read."

Engler also asked for more power to address local education problems, such as the Inkster district's financial crisis, at the state level.

"Give the state of Michigan clear legal authority to help school districts that are in

Education Highlights from State of the State Address

- Require fourth-graders who have not mastered reading to attend summer school.
- Provide opportunities for state intervention in school districts that are failing.
- An increase in state per-pupil expenditures that would raise the minimum funding level from \$5,600 today to \$6,500 by 2002-03.
- Cash bonuses of \$1,000 to school employees at 170 elementary schools whose students ace state assessment exams or make great improvements on test scores.
- Eliminate the 150-school cap on charter schools authorized by state universities.
- Permit statewide public school choice for all families.
- Create tax-free educational savings accounts to encourage parents to save for college or technical training.
- Boost community college aid for families earning less than \$40,000.

Source: Governor John Engler, Lessons from the 20th Century, Leadership for the 21st Century (2000 State of the State Address, Wednesday, January 19, 2000)

ing and reform. We will not have one without the other."

Reform, he said, requires "rigorous accountability from elected school boards and superintendents, outstanding performance from principals and educators, and full freedom for children and their families."

The governor's other proposals included abolishing the cap on university-authorized charter schools, granting principals greater autonomy in running their schools, and requiring children to attend summer school before the fourth grade if they have not learned to read.

"If by fourth grade a child still has not

trouble," he said. "Don't fail our children in failing districts."

Democrats responded positively to Engler's remarks, but expressed frustration at the timing of his proposals.

"Many of these issues are those that we've advanced and he's ignored," Rep. A.T. Frank (D-Saginaw) told the *Detroit Free Press*.

Republican leaders were cautiously optimistic about enacting the governor's ideas.

"The toughest proposal to pass will be raising the charter school cap," Senate Majority Leader Dan DeGrow (R-Port Huron) told *The Detroit News*. "We've already had trouble with that."

Legislature

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schools. It will also allow the district to hold the principals directly accountable for the educational performance in their schools."

Other Democrats criticized the effort as an infringement on the right of administrators to bargain collectively.

"The answer to public education seems to be 'let's be union busters,'" said Rep. Julie Dennis (D-Muskegon). "This is wrong for anyone who supports a person's right to collectively bargain, whether they are a teacher or an administrator."

But the bill's supporters say the interests of students come before those of unions.

"[T]he strident accusations of 'union busting' reveal that some people are more interested in protecting unions than in ensuring results with our kids," wrote Rep. Valde Garcia (R-St. John's) in a special letter to *The News*.

The bill in its original form would have applied to about 100 districts in Michigan, but lawmakers narrowed its scope dramatically during the debate in an effort to ensure its passage. The state House applied the proposal only to school districts with a reform board, in financial receivership, or in a self-declared financial emergency. Currently, only the districts of Detroit and Inkster would have qualified under that version. The state Senate introduced the version that eventually passed, applying the bill only to Detroit.

The narrowing of the bill to what ended up being predominantly black districts prompted some legislators to question the motivations behind the measure.

"Who is the population of those . . . cities? This is a racist bill," Rep. LaMar Lemmons (D-Detroit) told the bill's sup-

porters. "If it's such good public policy, why don't you decertify [administrators] in your district?"

Others suggested that the state should defer to local districts regarding this type of legislation.

"To micromanage the city of Detroit from Lansing is the wrong thing to do," declared Rep. Artina Tinsley Hardman (D-Detroit).

Governor Engler signed the bill, and it will take effect on March 10, 2000.

A bill to expand charter schools in Michigan, however, did not make it to the governor's desk. Engler had proposed an increase in the number of charter schools in Michigan by 50 schools for the fall 2000 school year and 25 in each year thereafter. The Senate approved the initial addition of 50 charters, but limited further increases to 25 in each of the next three years.

In a vote that would have approved the issue for debate, 49 House members voted yes while 58 voted no, including six Republicans. After tabling the issue, the GOP leadership was unable to approve an alternative before the holiday recess.

"We ran out of time," said House Speaker Chuck Perricone (R-Kalamazoo Township).

Republican lawmakers had hoped to approve an increase before the new year so that more charters could open in the fall of 2000. Except in the unlikely event of a supermajority approval in the first session of 2000, an increase in the cap now would not take effect until April 2001.

Current law allows state universities to sponsor an aggregate of 150 charters, a limit

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No Excuses

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well academically: Last year's third graders, for instance, scored in the 69th percentile in math on the Stanford-9 Achievement Test, while the kindergartners and first graders scored in the 81st and 74th percentiles in reading, respectively.

"No Excuses has highlighted that we're making progress while helping our faculty realize where improvements are necessary," Principal Sanders told *Michigan Education Report*.

Cornerstone's curriculum "emphasizes both the moral and academic development of the child" and "works in concert with a child's family and community to make good American citizens," Carter writes.

For her efforts at Cornerstone, Sanders earned the 1999 Salvatori Prize for American Citizenship, which is given annually by The Heritage Foundation to recognize and reward citizens who are helping their communities solve problems government has been unable to solve.

Observing these seven schools, Carter outlines the "seven common elements of high-performing, high-poverty schools," which include greater autonomy for princi-

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“New Democrats” Call for School Choice

Party-Affiliated Group Urges “Total Transformation” of Public Education

The issue of school choice has for years caused fissures in the Democratic Party, which receives significant support from labor unions including the anti-school choice Michigan Education Association (MEA).

However, the voices for greater competition in education are increasingly being heard from within the party.

The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) is now calling for reforms including school choice and merit pay for teachers.

DLC President Al From, writing in the Fall 1999 issue of the DLC’s journal of public policy, presented what he called “New Democrats’ 10 Key Reforms for Revitalizing American Education.”

“America is a tale of two public school systems: one that works reasonably well, although it could certainly be better, and one that is by almost any standard a disaster,” says From.

In addition to school choice and merit pay, From’s reforms include the establishment of performance goals for individual



DLC President Al From: Introduce “forces of choice and competition to every public school in America.”

schools, national standards and testing, a national teacher corps, character education, and post-secondary vocational programs. Other proposals include lengthening the school year and day, ensuring access to preschool, and allowing

experts who lack certification to teach. The public school system must improve to meet the challenges of the “new economy,” says From.

“The time has come for a whole new look at public education—not just inching ahead with incremental reforms, but a total transformation of how we educate our chil-

dren,” he says.

From argues that the public school system too often serves the interests of teachers and administrators at the expense of the students themselves. It is a “monopolistic” system that “offers a ‘one-size-fits-hardly-anyone’ model that strangles excellence and innovation” he says.

Characterizing charter schools as “oases of innovation,” From writes, “The time has come to bring life to the rest of the desert—by introducing the same forces of choice and competition to every public school in America.”

From also says Democrats should work to redefine the very notion of public education itself.

“We should rid ourselves of the rigid notion that public schools are defined by who owns and operates them,” he writes. “In the twenty-first century, a public school should be any school that is of the people (accountable to public authorities for its results), by the people (paid for by the pub-

lic), and for the people (open to the public and geared toward public purposes).”

The DLC’s mission, as part of the Democratic Party, is to articulate “a new public philosophy built on progressive ideals, mainstream values, and innovative, nonbureaucratic solutions.”

Commonly known as the “New Democrats,” the DLC was noted in 1992 as playing an instrumental role in the nomination of one of its former chairs, Bill Clinton, as the party’s candidate for president.

Michigan Democratic Party Chair Mark Brewer declined to comment on the DLC position. Senate Minority Leader John Cherry and House Democratic Leader Mike Hanley both failed to respond to inquiries by *MER*.

Charter Competition Helps Public Schools Improve, Says MSU Study

But Researchers, Administrators Divided over Issue of Accountability

The number of charter schools in Michigan should be expanded, but the state needs to improve regulations to govern the schools’ operation, according to a recent study from three Michigan State University professors.

The 99-page study, *School Choice Policies in Michigan: The Rules Matter*, concludes that competition from charters has helped bring improvements to public schools—such as more after-school programs—and that additional charters will bring further improvements, particularly for low-income children.

But the study cautions that while private educational management companies have fueled the charter explosion, the importance of public accountability needs to be better respected.

“We’re not saying the emergence of educational management organizations is bad, but it raises issues including how they’re spending public money,” explains David Arsen, an associate professor in MSU’s James Madison College and one of the report’s co-authors.

The study also argues the state must help children who cannot take advantage of charters and are instead forced to remain in troubled districts.

“Choice is good, but you have to minimize the costs that it imposes on some kids,” says Arsen. “Our position is not that failing districts have to be saved, but that children in these districts can’t be hurt and the state has a responsibility to them.”

The study has drawn criticism from some charter school supporters, who deny that charters are any less accountable to the public than traditional public schools.

“I get skeptical of a report that calls for anything beyond what’s expected of all public schools,” says Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. “We’re empowering parents and teachers to be effective. We don’t want to weigh them down with state-wide rules and regulations.”

But Arsen and the study’s two other co-authors, Professors Gary Sykes and David Plank, report that charter schools often neglect high school and special education students, who cost the most to educate. This trend raises costs at traditional public schools, increasing the likelihood that a district will fall into financial ruin, they say.

“Michigan should take active steps now, before a crisis occurs, before a school district fails,” warns Plank.

Quisenberry disagrees again, noting that state law requires charter schools to ac-

countability. Charters do maintain accountability, Ladner argues, but this accountability ultimately involves parents rather than the government.

The Mackinac Center’s study also dif-

fer with the MSU professors’ conclusion that charter schools have not resulted in significant innovation in elementary education. The professors cite as evidence the fact that methods of teaching in charters are often “indistinguishable” from those of traditional

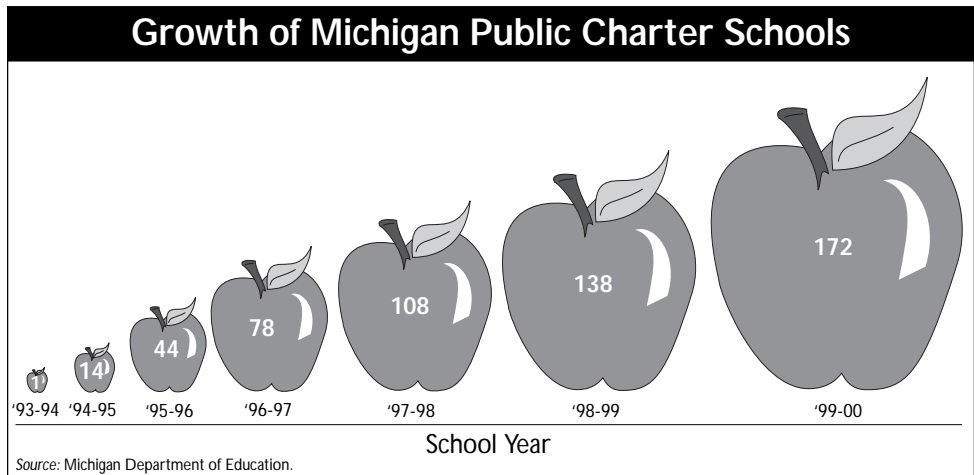
public schools. Ladner and Brouillette note that the charter schools’ incentive to respond directly to parental demands increases the likelihood they will adopt programs and methods that are effective.

“The question of whether or not charter schools are doing things that no school has done before is almost irrelevant,” they write. “Charter schools simply increase the availability and diversity of programs that are available to individual parents, which is much more important.”

Charter school administrators also dismissed the MSU study’s conclusion on innovation as unimportant.

“In public education, we have tried all sorts of innovations for the last 30 years,” says Jeff Poole, a spokesman for National Heritage Academies, a private Grand Rapids company that manages charter schools. “Parents want good, solid, back-to-basics academics with excellent results.”

Dr. Ormand Hook, principal of Crossroads Charter Academy in Big Rapids, says, “There is nothing new under the sun. We are merely providing instruction that has been proven to work over the centuries, not some new curriculum fads.”



cept all applicants. He also notes that nearly 70 percent of Michigan’s charter schools are offering middle and/or high school grades this year, up dramatically from about 40 percent in the 1998-99 school year. Much of the increase comes from schools that are adding a grade each year as planned in their charter contracts.

“Charters often open with a set number of grades, work to have those running smoothly, and then add grades as students progress,” Quisenberry says. “This 70-percent figure once again proves that the naysayers are grossly exaggerating.”

Quisenberry adds that a growing number of charter schools are also serving students with special needs (see related story on page 6).

Meanwhile, a charter school study soon to be released by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy draws both similar and different conclusions from the MSU study.

Study authors Dr. Matthew Ladner, president of Capital Research and Consulting in Texas, and Matthew J. Brouillette, director of education policy at the Mackinac Center agree with the MSU study that charter schools have helped to improve traditional public schools. “The competitive pressures of charter schools can prompt improvement or innovation in public school curriculum,” they say.

But the study’s findings contrast with the MSU study on the issue of public ac-

countability. Charters do maintain accountability, Ladner argues, but this accountability ultimately involves parents rather than the government.

Teacher Shortage Has Districts Scrambling

Superintendents Turn to Private Company for Substitute Staffing

In an effort to address their shortage of substitute teachers, Metro Detroit schools are enlisting the help of Kelly Services, a Fortune 500 temporary employment agency with 1,800 offices in 19 countries.

The Troy-based agency has established the Kelly Educational Staffing program, which will advertise open positions in both public and private schools, interview applicants, and train substitute teachers for grades K-12.

“The program is win-win for everyone,” says Teresa Setting, director of Kelly Services Product Management. “With one

call to their local branch office, school administrators can find the substitute teachers they need.”

Kelly Services conducts background and reference checks on each applicant to ensure that its substitutes are qualified. Candidates also must meet local certification requirements.

Additionally, Kelly provides the substitutes with a handbook and other orientation materials.

“Because our expertise is staffing, Kelly can find and manage more eligible candi-

KELLY SERVICES continued on page 8

Detroit Teachers Not Receiving Paychecks

Privatization of Payroll Service Could Fix Problem, Say Observers

Aaron Carr wants what he is owed and he wants it now. Or at least at some point during his lifetime.

Carr, a technician at King High School, is just one of 20,000 employees of the Detroit school district who is having difficulties receiving his paycheck.

Carr works overtime to prepare the school football field for games. He told *The Detroit News*, however, that the district still owes him \$5,000 in overtime pay and that he will not work overtime until he receives his check.

Many Detroit teachers and other staff have received their paychecks late, have been underpaid, or have failed to receive a check at all. In response, the Detroit Federation of Teachers has sued the district, demanding any pay raises and back pay that teachers have yet to receive.

The payroll problem has persisted for

nearly six years but has created additional tension in the wake of the recent teachers' strike. But such problems are not unique to Detroit. They have become almost commonplace in other large school districts including Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.

The recurring troubles in Detroit have revived calls for the privatization of the district's payroll service, a move that interim Chief Executive Officer David Adamany has considered.

"This persistent problem should embolden . . . Adamany to carry out his proposal to outsource or contract out the payroll function," *The Detroit News* editorialized. "Given the continued inability of the payroll department to do the job, outsourcing the work, or at least a part of it, has become an imperative, even if it means job losses."

Outsourcing could actually be a win-win situation for teachers and taxpayers, says

Michael LaFaive, managing editor of *Michigan Privatization Report*. "Turning payroll over to a private company with an incentive to do the job right will ensure that teachers get paid, and most likely will lead to savings for the district.

"Most importantly, more resources—in terms of dollars and teachers' time—could then be directed to the classroom," he adds.

Already, Adamany has implemented a new payroll computer program and established a Payroll Service Center to address problems.

For at least two years, observers have blamed the district's human resources department for the recurring problems. Audits have shown that the department lacks the necessary training and skills, and its largely manual system disrupts communication and often leads to inaccuracies.

The payroll problems have forced many

teachers to wait in line at the Schools Center Building for as long as two hours simply to receive pay that they already should have received.

Apart from the obvious inconvenience to the teachers, the time that it has taken to remedy this situation has had an indirect effect on the district's 180,000 students. Instead of educating students, teachers have had to spend time dealing with bureaucracy.

"What a waste of time," Kettering High School teacher Granville Caldwell told *The News*. "I could have spent the time preparing lessons for my students."

Despite the persistence of the problem, Adamany cites improvements that have been made this fall. Errors fell from the first pay cycle to the second by about a third to less than 200, but many more teachers may have received their checks late or not at all.

What Are Intermediate School Districts?

Most Michigan Parents, Students Unaware of Role They Play

Do you know which intermediate school district you live in?

No, not your local school district, your *intermediate* school district (ISD).

Give up? Don't feel bad if you don't know. Unless you are a public school employee, you are probably like most Michigan residents in that you are not even sure what an ISD is or does.

Michigan's 57 ISDs were formed in 1962 by Public Act 190, which took the state's existing 83 county school districts and renamed and reorganized them under the new name of "intermediate school districts."

ISDs are structured as separate taxing units to provide various administrative and instructional services to local school districts. All Michigan ISDs have elected board members. However, unlike school board members in local school districts who are popularly elected by the residents of a given school district, many ISD boards of education are chosen by the board members of each local school district within its borders. Each ISD has a superintendent that is hired by the board of education.

In 1989, some Michigan ISDs were renamed as Regional Educational Service Agencies, Educational Service Districts, or Educational Service Agencies to clearly reflect their mission and purpose.

"ISDs do many things," says Ronald

Koehler, director of communication services for the Kent County ISD in Grand Rapids, which encompasses 20 school districts with a K-12 student population of 130,000.

Koehler identifies three distinct areas that many ISDs, including his, typically serve.

One area involves the accounting and auditing of student numbers for each district. Since Michigan counts students twice per year (in September and February) for funding purposes, the ISD provides auditors who visit each district to review student enrollment numbers. The auditors report each school district's K-12 student count to the state government. The data are then used for providing state aid to each local district.

Another area is the oversight of special education for local school districts. ISDs help relieve individual school districts of the responsibility of operating individual special education programs.

ISDs' third area of responsibility focuses on career technical education and career preparatory programs. In Kent County, approximately 2,500 students benefit from various vocational courses offered at the Kent Career and Technical Center. The emphasis is on hands-on education in courses ranging from agri-science to computer aided design.

Koehler adds that his ISD also provides

general educational services in professional development activities for administrators, teachers, and staff. In addition, various advisory committees consisting of representatives from local school districts meet to determine district needs.

The Bay-Arenac ISD—composed of seven school districts with a student population of 30,000—in Michigan's "thumb area" offers its local districts career technical education, professional development activities, curriculum development assistance, grant writing expertise, and pupil accounting.

"Our mission is formed by what our school districts want," says Geraldine Allen, supervisor of communications for the Washtenaw ISD in Ann Arbor, which encompasses 10 school districts with a student population of 43,000. "It is a fine line between service and leadership."

More sparsely populated areas in

Michigan also enjoy the benefits of ISDs. Iosco Regional Service Agency serves four school districts with a student population of 6,500.

Iosco Superintendent Thomas Caldwell says that some of his ISD's services may be provided by consortiums, collaborations with other ISDs, or other cooperative ventures.

He points out that there is a cooperative venture to provide a satellite math and science center for students in his ISD as well as a proposed consortium for interactive television with the Crawford-Oscoda-Ogemaw-Roscommon ISD in Roscommon and the Alpena-Montmorency-Alcona ISD in Alpena.

"Overall, we provide general education support, curriculum support, career-technical education, and serve as a liaison between the schools and the Michigan Department of Education," Caldwell says.

Legislature

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that the universities have reached.

Defeating the bill was a coalition that fears the effects of charter schools on traditional public schools. The Michigan Education Association (MEA) also opposed the bill.

"It was our election goal to find friends of public education from both parties," MEA lobbyist Al Short told the *Lansing State Journal*. "This was a major field operation achievement."

Despite this legislative defeat, some charter school advocates remain optimistic about raising the cap in the long run.

"Charter schools have strong public support," Dan Quisenberry, executive director of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, told *MER*. He cited a survey by Marketing Resource Group, Inc., showing that 62 percent of Michigan voters support charter schools.

"We are optimistic that the legislature will respond to the public," Quisenberry added.

The House plans to revisit the issue later this year.



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Vouchers Spark Controversy, Make Strange Bedfellows

Republicans, Democrats Both Split on Kids First! Yes! Ballot Proposal

November 2000 is many months away, but a proposed school voucher ballot initiative is already causing controversy and spawning unusual political alliances.

The Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB), a lobbying and advisory organization, has encouraged several local school boards to pass resolutions against the Kids First! Yes! voucher proposal, prompting charges of impropriety.

"I'd be very wary of using a public school to promote a political agenda," Matt Latimer, communications director of Kids First! Yes!, told the *Traverse City Record-Eagle*. "That is very questionable, at best."

According to All Kids First!, a coalition of groups that opposes vouchers, several school boards have approved formal resolutions opposing the voucher plan, including Bloomfield Hills, Livonia, and Monroe. The Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency has also adopted a similar resolution.

"I would suspect you will see schools all over the state doing this," Greg Williams, president of the Traverse City School Board, told the *Record-Eagle*. The Traverse City Board also has adopted such a resolution.

"It is clear that this proposal will divert scarce resources from public schools while it subsidizes private and religious schools which are not subject to any oversight from any elected officials," a model resolution drafted by MASB states in part.

The proposal also has opened rifts



Some Republicans, including Governor John Engler, oppose the Kids First! Yes! voucher proposal embraced by many civil rights leaders who traditionally join anti-voucher labor unions in voting Democratic.

within the Michigan Republican Party, whose candidates generally have been more supportive of vouchers.

Republican Governor John Engler is at odds with Amway President Dick DeVos, co-chair of Kids First! Yes! and husband of state GOP chair Betsy DeVos.

Engler, who has announced his opposition to the voucher proposal, asked the Michigan Republican State Committee to delay a vote that could endorse the proposal. The committee honored Engler's request.

However, a state GOP subcommittee already has endorsed the proposal by a unanimous vote.

Engler appointed a special committee to study the issue and make a recommendation. He asked the Republican State Committee to postpone any vote until after the special committee completes its work.

"Even among those who advocate school vouchers, there is disagreement on whether or not the specifics of the Kids First!

Yes! ballot initiative is the correct strategy," Engler wrote to the State Committee.

Betsy DeVos responded, "There is nothing productive gained by this committee taking a vote that would embarrass our governor."

Dick DeVos has publicly criticized Engler for not supporting the initiative.

"To many of John Engler's supporters it would be frightening if he was arm in arm with the [Michigan Education Association] against the voucher effort," DeVos said.

Engler's opposition to the proposal has him aligned with a number of organizations which traditionally oppose his positions. Among these groups are the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, People for the American Way, the Detroit Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Michigan Education Association.

Meanwhile, Kids First! Yes! has gained support from many traditionally Democratic constituencies, including inner-city pastors and civil rights leaders.

If the proposal wins in November 2000, it would repeal the state constitutional ban upon indirect aid to parents for tuition at private and parochial schools. Voters in Michigan approved a prohibition on both direct and indirect aid in 1970.

Detroit Reform Board Fails to Select New CEO

State Appointee Exercises Veto against Majority

And then there were none.

After whittling a field of 320 candidates down to two finalists, the new Detroit school reform board now must restart the process of locating a permanent chief executive officer.

The seven-member board found five votes in support of Tulsa, Oklahoma, Public Schools Superintendent John W. Thompson, but it failed to secure the support of Mark Murray, the state's representative on the board. The law that replaced Detroit's elected school board with the reform board allows at least five members to hire a CEO, but requires the state's representative to be one of those five.

The seventh board member, Glenda Price, abstained from voting.

Murray supported the other finalist, J. Jerome Harris, a school consultant who has served as a superintendent in the districts of Atlanta, Brooklyn, and Compton, California.

Three members of the board—including Murray, Detroit Deputy Mayor and Board Chairman Freman Hendrix, and DaimlerChrysler executive W. Frank Fountain—will form a committee to search for additional candidates, possibly focusing upon applicants with backgrounds in business or the military. Hendrix has called for the board to make a decision within six weeks.

Murray's veto of the board's decision prompted some to call for revisions in the law that governs the reform board. Most notably, Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer called for more control over the process.

"If you don't want to amend the legislation taking away the veto, then give me the responsibility," Archer said at a news conference. "Give me the responsibility for appointing all of the school board members; give me the responsibility for appointing the CEO and the relevant officers that will be needed."

Republican lawmakers dismissed these changes as unnecessary, but have hinted that additional gridlock on the board may

prompt them to grant Governor John Engler the power to hire a CEO. Gubernatorial intervention, however, remains unlikely, according to John Truscott, press secretary for Engler.

Board members also expressed frustration both at their failure to hire a CEO and at the law that requires Murray's vote.

"But for this law, we had a super-majority of the board that agreed on a candidate," Hendrix told the *Detroit Free Press*. "Anyplace else in America, that would have been enough."

The board has been under pressure to make a decision as quickly as possible so that the new CEO can begin implementing reforms by the start of the new school year in the fall.

The 5-1 vote—particularly Murray's veto—also angered many in the 100-person crowd that attended the public decision.

"Mark Murray doesn't understand a community that fought for its rights," said Wayne County Commissioner Bernard Parker. "I feel like a slave; I feel like my master just told me what to do."

Explaining his decision to not support Thompson, Murray stressed the importance of test scores and stated that Thompson's record of improving scores was not satisfactory.

"I've said from the beginning that the right candidate needs to be able to demonstrate improved academic performance," Murray said.

The board's failure to hire a CEO has added an element of uncertainty to the search. Some believe that the vote could deter candidates from considering the job in Detroit. Additionally, qualified candidates are becoming more difficult to secure, as at least 12 other urban districts are presently searching for new leaders.

Hendrix also intimated that the vote could disrupt the fragile relationship between Detroit and Lansing.

"There has been a gulf that has existed between Lansing and Detroit, and tonight I'm afraid that gulf broadened," he said af-

ter the vote.

The new CEO will replace former Wayne State University president David Adamany, who has served since May on an

interim basis. Adamany says he will continue in his position at least until his contract expires in mid-May of this year.

Parents Seek Education Alternatives

More Turn to Private and Home School Options

A growing number of Michigan parents are looking beyond traditional public schools to private and home school options for the education of their children.

Private schools in Metro Detroit—some with tuition costs as high as \$16,000 per year—have reported significant increases in inquiries from parents. Some soon-to-be parents have gone so far as to contact private high schools even before their children are born, *The Detroit News* reported.

"I would call it interest and curiosity," Jorge Prospero, director of admissions at Detroit Country Day School in Beverly Hills, told the *News*. "They use the word shopping: 'We're shopping around.' I notice that they want to compare and contrast."

Over the last decade, nationwide enrollment in private schools has increased by nearly 17 percent, according to the National Association of Independent Schools.

As a result, many private schools have compiled waiting lists for admission. Greenhills School, a preparatory school serving grades 6-12 in Ann Arbor, has a waiting list for grades six and nine, for instance.

Many parents say their interest in private schools stems from the schools' reputations for high quality, but also cite concerns over public school safety and an increasing interest in the possibility of tuition vouchers. Parents also point to small classes and college preparatory curricula as reasons

why they consider private schools.

Other parents have gone as far as to educate their children themselves at home, helping to fuel a growing nationwide movement. Although home schoolers are difficult to track, the National Home Education Research Institute estimates that as many as



Kathy De Pree of Midland knows what many studies have shown: Parental involvement is crucial to children's educational success. Above, daughter Kelsey and son Kurtis learn their lessons from mom.

1.7 million children receive their education at home and that this number grows by as much as 15 percent per year.

Home schooling advocates estimate that roughly 50,000 children in Michigan participate in home schooling. Brad Wurfel of the Michigan Department of Education

HOME SCHOOLING continued on page 8

STUDENT FOCUS

Special Needs Students Make Great Strides

Charter School Provides Help Where Other Schools Could Not

When it comes to students with special learning needs, frustration is an emotion often felt by both child and parent.

"We definitely understand that emotion!" says Diana Jorgenson, whose two sons struggle through school with special learning needs.

Instructional assistant Lynda Howe also understands frustration. "If you haven't lived in a dyslexic family, then you can't understand," she says.

So where do these students go for help? Parents of children with special learning needs have often been relegated to the local public school. But that seems to be changing with the creation of more and more charter schools in Michigan.

In the early stages of the charter school movement, most academies were not designed specifically to serve students with special learning needs. But for the Jorgensen and Howe families, it was the Crossroads Charter Academy in Big Rapids where they finally found their children's needs being met.

Crossroads—which occupies the middle school building vacated by Big Rapids Public Schools when it built a new facility—has established a relationship with the Mecosta-Osceola Intermediate School District to provide special education services on the charter school site.

Andrew "A.J." Jorgensen was part of the inaugural class at Crossroads last year and is now in the fourth grade. After A.J. struggled through first and second grade in a parochial school, the Jorgensens decided to place him in a third-grade "resource room" at the local public school.

"But by the end of the year, the school told me he had made very few gains," recalls Diana Jorgenson. "I was really upset, to say the least. So when I came here to

Crossroads, I was pretty distraught. I felt like I had run out of options for my child."

Dr. Ormand Hook, principal of Crossroads, was a bit concerned that his school would not be able to meet the needs of A.J. However, after discussing what his school could offer, the Jorgensens decided to enroll their son in the third grade again for the 1998-99 school year.

"Dr. Hook worked with us and helped us make the best decision for A.J.," Mrs. Jorgensen says. And with lots of hard work including summers, A.J. is now steadily improving his reading skills.

"He's making A's and B's," Diana says. "And it's not because they [his teachers] are doing it for him. He is doing all the work and, most importantly, he understands what he's learned."

Much of the credit is given to Lynda Howe, who in addition to being an instructional assistant also has two daughters at Crossroads.

Lynda homeschooled her daughters for seven years before putting them into a traditional public school for two years. The girls are now in the sixth and ninth grades at Crossroads.

"My oldest daughter could not learn how to read," Lynda says. "We worked on it year after year, and I knew I had a good curriculum. I successfully taught other subjects for a long time." Finally, Lynda was able to get some help for her eldest daughter.

"We had her tested and they did everything except say the word 'dyslexia.' It was a world I had never seen before. But from that moment on, I sought to receive all of the training I could possibly receive."

At that point, the Howes decided to enroll their daughters in the local public school to get the help they needed, but her



Crossroads Charter Academy instructional assistant Lynda Howe helps A.J. Jorgensen overcome his learning disability. A.J.'s parents tried both public and parochial schools before they found a school to meet their son's needs.

daughter's difficulties continued.

After pulling their oldest daughter out of school for the last month of the school year, the Howes had to decide what to do for the coming school year.

"That was when Crossroads opened up," Lynda recalls. She remembers telling the new school, "If your heart is for learning disabled kids, we're here and I'm on board. But if that's not where your heart is, then I'll teach my kids at home."

Lynda was "extremely impressed" by Crossroads's commitment to students with special learning needs and not only enrolled her daughters, but also joined the staff.

And for the past two years, Lynda has been helping A.J. deal with his learning disabilities. "Understanding and helping children with learning disabilities has become my passion," she says.

According to Lynda, A.J. has continued to improve his reading skills through countless hours of hard work and parental support.

"He's still working at it," Diana Jorgensen says. "He probably won't be up to level for some time, but I see that he's gaining. I can see a progress."

TEACHER FOCUS

Corporate Consultant Takes Students from Nervous "Squeakers" to Public Speakers

She radiates passion for her subject and love for her students. They respond with eager hands, creased brows, and chewed pencils: the signs of thought and of learning.

For many of her students, this class is the beginning of something greater than improved speaking, something more persuasive than a heated debate. It is the birth of their self-confidence.

"It's always been my mission to help people grow," says Dorris Reese, managing director of Dior Training and Consulting and instructor for the course, "Speak Up With Confidence."

Reese brings her more than 20 years' experience in designing and conducting speech workshops for corporate employees to the public speaking and debate courses that she now teaches for homeschooled students.

In a typical six-week course like the one she teaches in Southfield, Reese takes her students from reticent, nervous "squeakers"—to use one student's phrase—to poised public speakers.

She teaches students how to write and give speeches and instructs them in the im-



Public speaking expert Dorris Reese helps home schooled children polish their skills, but public school students cannot benefit from her 20 years of experience unless she takes college education courses to become state-certified.

portance of organization and the role of body language in giving a speech. She even helps

them with their nervousness by telling them, "The trick is not to get rid of your butterflies but to have the butterflies fly in formation."

According to their evaluations of Reese's classes, students find topics such as "making eye contact," "how to write your presentation" and "gestures" to be extremely useful information that they can use in many ways throughout their lives.

"I see my role as assisting in the development of the teen," says Reese. "I want to help them develop further discipline. I want them to see the bigger picture."

For Reese, a devout Christian, that "bigger picture" is nothing less than God's individual plan for each student. It is her faith that ignites her passion for teaching.

"I tell my students that their confidence is in God, that He can help them in all things," she says.

According to Reese, students need to be good stewards of their God-given talents. To this end, she urges each of them to remember and practice what she calls the "4 Ps" of public speaking: "Pray," "Prepare," "Practice," and "Present."

Reese has been a corporate consultant with Dior for 20 years, and while she says her she has always enjoyed her work, she began about 10 years ago to feel a desire to "give back to the faith-based community."

An opportunity to do so came when a friend, Debbie Rossi, suggested that Reese offer her public speaking workshops to a group of homeschooled kids. According to Reese, Rossi said, "I'll find the students if

you'll agree to teach them."

Reese enthusiastically agreed, and since that time, over 200 homeschooled students have benefited from her expertise.

For such an opportunity Reese is humbly grateful. Of her students she says, "I hope they see Christ in me. I hope they will have God be a part of who they are."

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Private, Faith-Based Organization Helps Troubled Youth

For over 50 Years, Boysville of Michigan Has Educated, Rehabilitated Wayward Teens

Many people think of “private education” as ivy-covered buildings full of elite students from wealthy families. Conversely, they believe that public schools are where one finds all other students, including the most troubled of youths.

But that view is an inaccurate one, as many privately funded educational organizations are showing by their commitment to helping troubled students get back on track.

One such organization is Boysville of Michigan, Inc., a child care and family preservation agency founded in 1948. A Catholic organization, Boysville seeks to rehabilitate troubled or adjudicated adolescents and provide them with a stable family life. Its official mission is “to provide for the social, emotional, educational, economic, and spiritual needs of its clients and staff with the goal of empowering children and families to function effectively in their community.”

As a private, nonprofit organization, Boysville does not receive any tax funding, but it does receive compensation from the state for services rendered. About 90 percent of its \$40 million annual budget comes from revenue from its services, and the remaining 10 percent comes from fundraising, according to David Jablonski, communications director for Boysville.

Boysville defines success according to three criteria: whether a child secures a legal home setting, whether he retains employment or remains in school, and whether he avoids any further trouble with the law. Under these standards, Boysville holds an 80-percent success rate after 12 months of treatment.

“Since 1990, Boysville has served over 12,000 youths, so an 80-percent success rate speaks for itself,” Jablonski told *MER*.

“We’re striving to impact the remaining 20 percent.”

Because most of the youths academically lag behind their peers, Boysville has made education “a key component” of its treatment, Jablonski indicated. The agency has a school on its main campus in Clinton and it has chartered the Charlotte Forten Academy in Detroit.

“We must ensure that education is not a deterrent to a child’s self-esteem,” Jablonski says.

The agency also provides spiritual guidance to the children, but they are not required to be Catholic.

“There must be a spiritual component in the lives of these kids,” Jablonski explained, “but it is up to them to decide what that component is.”

Serving over 1,000 boys—and girls—each day, Boysville’s programs in 1998 reached 70 counties in Michigan and 27 counties in Ohio, including cities such as Detroit, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Saginaw, Traverse City, and Toledo. The programs have helped tens of thousands of children over Boysville’s 52-year history.

Boysville’s programs are divided into three major types: residential services, home and community-based services, and assessment and detention alternatives.

The residential services offer therapeutic and educational programs both in large campus settings and in smaller, more domestic atmospheres. Some residential programs help children who have abused substances or committed sexual offenses, and a special program addresses the needs of mentally impaired boys.

Boysville’s home and community-based services provide foster care to youths who need the strong support of a family.



The St. Vincent Home in Saginaw administers several of Boysville’s programs for troubled youths, including campus residential services and foster care.

The programs also offer outpatient drug counseling and support services for parents. The organization also has several secure and non-secure detention facilities, where delinquent youths can undergo comprehensive evaluations and rehabilitation.

Boysville maintains its Boysville Center for Policy and Practice Development, through which the staff cooperates with scholars to improve the agency’s services and to provide information to other organizations. The agency’s program evaluation department—a feature that most similar agencies lack—also focuses upon improving services.

Boysville originated over 50 years ago, when Edward Cardinal Mooney, the archbishop of Detroit, invited the Brothers of Holy Cross to run an orphanage in Clinton. The orphanage began to serve court-appointed youth in the 1960s. Today, about 70 percent of Boysville children have faced adjudication.

America Takes Top Honors in 1999 Nobel Prizes

Foreign-Born Winners Demonstrate Need for K-12 School Reform, Say Critics

The awarding of most of 1999’s Nobel Prizes to researchers at U. S. universities has prompted a number of observers to cite this event as proof of the quality of American higher education.

But some think the current crop of Nobel laureates only illustrates serious problems with the U. S. public school system in general.

“While Americans won the lion’s share of Nobel Prizes again this year, not one of these winners was actually born in the United States,” notes economist and Hoover Institute Senior Fellow Thomas Sowell. “This is not a vindication but an indictment of our educational system.”

The 1999 recipients include Robert Mundell, a Canadian-born professor at Columbia University, who received the Nobel Prize for economics; Ahmed Zewail, an Egyptian-born scientist at the California Institute of Technology, who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry; and Günter Blobel, a German biologist at New York’s Rockefeller University, who won the prize for medicine.

Two Dutch scientists—the University of Michigan’s Martinus J.G. Veltman and the University of Utrecht’s Gerardus ’t Hooft—won the Nobel Prize for physics. Günter Grass, a German author, received the prize for literature, and a French organization, Doctors Without Borders (or Médecins Sans Frontières), earned the peace prize.

“Why were a quarter of a billion native-born Americans unable to win a single Nobel Prize this year, when a relative handful of naturalized Americans won so many?” asks Sowell.

The answer, he says, is that K-12 public education has failed to prepare American children for the intellectual rigors of higher



University of Michigan professor emeritus Martinus J.G. Veltman (left) is one of four professors from American universities who received a Nobel Prize in 1999—and who was not educated in American schools.

education. American students, he argues, cannot compete with their foreign counterparts, who have received better preparation at the elementary and secondary levels, particularly in math and the sciences.

“Less than half the Ph.D.s in engineering and mathematics awarded by American universities are received by Americans,” Sowell notes.

Thomas Bertonneau, executive director of the Association of Literary Scholars

and Critics, also argues that this trend reveals problems concerning elementary and secondary education.

“The dominance of foreign-born students in hard-science programs in American universities is one of the less-discussed aspects of the dumbing-down of American education at all levels,” he told *MER*. “American math-education is especially deficient, according to the major studies that have investigated it in recent years.

“Given the antecedence of math competency to any hard-science curriculum, it’s not surprising that fewer and fewer American students choose these tracks,” he adds.

Sowell also indicates that there is an inverse relationship between the difficulty of a subject and the proportion of American students that have chosen that field. The decline of American students in comprehensive subjects over the past 20 years coincides with a drop in test scores among American children, he says.

“Our current world leadership in science and technology, like our leadership in Nobel Prizes, owes much to people who never went through . . . American schools and colleges,” he says. “Many come from countries which spend far less per pupil than we do but get far better results for their money.”

But why are American universities so prestigious if American public education has these problems? According to Mark Perry, an assistant professor of economics at the University of Michigan-Flint, the answer concerns the competitive market in higher education.

“Competition breeds competence, and higher education is extremely competitive and therefore has achieved an extremely high level of competence and quality,” he told *MER*. “Unlike public universities, elementary and secondary public schools have a virtual monopoly on education at the lower levels, so the low quality of education is predictable.”

“Public education is suffering from the problems of inefficiency, declining quality, and rising costs that result when an organization is protected from competition,” he says.

Kelly Services

continued from page 3

dates than schools can alone," Setting says. "Our orientation process and quality control measures, developed with the schools, ensure [that] only the most qualified substitute teachers end up in front of children."

Schools that take referrals from Kelly must enter into a contract with the agency as well as pay an administrative fee for each substitute that Kelly locates for them.

"Initially, it will cost the districts more," Kim Osborne, a spokeswoman for Kelly, told the *News*. "But in the long run, they will see savings."

"The Kelly program is worth it in terms of time savings alone," adds Carlos Hicks, superintendent of the Gulfport, Mississippi, district where Kelly first provided substitute service in 1997.

Kelly Services locates more than 750,000 employees each year for a wide range of jobs. The agency provides ben-

efits to its temporary employees, including paid vacations and flexibility regarding choice of workplace.

The shortage of substitute teachers in metro Detroit mirrors a national problem. Although an average 96,000 teachers nationwide are absent from school each day, there are not enough qualified substitutes to meet this demand on a regular basis. Surveys indicate that over 90 percent of the nation's school districts struggle to locate substitutes.

Some districts even have resorted to hiring parents or people with no more qualifications than a high school diploma.

"The main goal is often to get a warm body in there," Max Longhurst, an education specialist with Utah State University's Substitute Teacher Institute, told *USA Today*.

The shortage has arisen because many substitutes have taken full-time positions or

have quit teaching altogether. Additionally, the strong economy has presented substitutes with more lucrative opportunities.

"I'll try anything and anybody who can find substitutes for us," Sue Kenyon, superintendent of Dearborn Heights District No. 7, told *The Detroit News*. "We have been short of substitute teachers every day this year."

Several districts in Michigan also are providing additional economic incentives to attract substitutes. The Warren Consolidated School District, for instance, increased pay for non-certified substitutes from \$68 to \$72 per day, and certified substitutes received a boost from \$72 to \$76 per day.

Home Schooling

continued from page 5

told *The Detroit News* that 2,140 students reported their home-schooling status during the 1998-99 school year.

The Department of Education numbers reflect the fact that Michigan parents who home school are not required to register with the state; however, Rep. Gilda Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) has introduced an anti-truancy bill (HB 5198) that could force home schooling families to register with their resident school districts.

Parents say they choose home schooling for a variety of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the traditional classroom environment, a desire to strengthen familial relationships, and religious convictions.

"I was frustrated with the schools that my kids were in," says Brenda Sawyer of Jackson, who home schooled her three children starting in 1983. Problems abounded in both the public and Christian schools in her area, she says.

"I wanted to give my kids something better than what I had," her husband, Mike, adds. "The Bible says that parents have a responsibility to teach their children."

Home schoolers also value the time that they must dedicate to their children. "It is very rewarding to be there when your child first reads," says Kathy De Pree of Midland, who home schooled her five children.

Another advantage of home schooling is its flexibility. De Pree indicated that thousands of home schooling curricula now exist, and this variety allows parents to tailor their lessons to their teaching styles and their children's needs.

To some parents, it may appear daunting to teach their children, but the importance of education demands sacrifice in the short term, notes Yolanda Haynes of Detroit, who has home schooled five children and will home school her remaining two. "Pay now or pay later," she says.

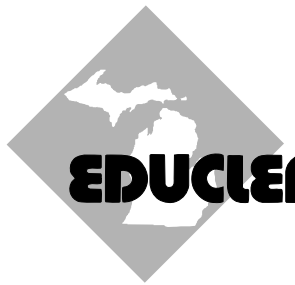
But education may not be the biggest challenge of home schooling.

"Academics is the easy part," says De Pree. "The hard part is training your child's character."

The efforts of home schooling, however, generally prove rewarding and beneficial in the long run, most advocates say.

"It's rewarding when your kids come back and say, 'I'm glad I was home schooled,'" Haynes says.

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COMMENTARY

Blowing the Whistle on Dumbed-Down Math



Vin Suprynowicz

Vin Suprynowicz is assistant editorial page editor of the Las Vegas Review-Journal.

What do you do if your middle-school students' math scores are falling, and you've got to put a better face on things?

Why, teach them something else—something much easier, like playing with blocks or cutting out pictures—and simply call it math.

Yes, our educators should remain open to new methods for putting across hard-to-grasp, abstract concepts. But in the end, they still have to make sure the child can count, do sums, and (eventually) master long division. And it's precisely the acquisition and demonstration of such rigorous skills that get short-changed in the 10 new flashy but

feeble "alternative math programs" recently endorsed by the federal Department of Education (DOE).

At least, that's the judgment of David Klein, math professor at California State University at Northridge, and more than 200 other scholars who put their names to a letter and full-page ad in the November 18 *Washington Post* urging federal Education Secretary Richard Riley to stop endorsing such proprietary programs as "MathLand," which purposely avoids lessons with "predetermined numerical results" (that is to say, answers that could be gotten wrong), instead urging young children to "count" using calculators, while replacing textbooks with "manipulative kits" featuring pattern blocks and cubes.

Such programs purposely sidestep the development of such important skills as dividing fractions and multiplication of multi-digit numbers, the scholars warn. And without those skills, the students will have trouble ever mastering such advanced un-

dertakings as algebra, calculus, and physics, which in turn form the foundation for any professional career in engineering.

Those signing the ad and letter include the heads of the math departments at Stanford and the California Institute of Technology, four Nobel laureates in physics, and two recipients of the Fields Medal—the world's top honor in mathematics.

"Many of us felt they were among the worst programs in existence," Professor Klein says of the 10 programs endorsed by the DOE. "It would be a joke except for the damaging effect it has on children."

One second-grade exercise in "MathLand" pretends to teach division by asking students to think up a lunch, draw it on paper, and then cut out the different foods and place their drawings in a bag.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported October 17 that even the tiny tots carrying out this exercise have asked, "Can we do some real math now?"

Rather than helping fix the problem of sagging math scores, such dumbed-down schemes have actually caused the problem, the scholars assert—starting with California's 1992 adoption of a revised "Mathematics Framework" which urges that children not be taught what adults already know about mathematics, but should instead be required to reinvent it for themselves.

Sort of like teaching auto shop by leading the students to deposits of coal, iron ore, and petroleum, and saying: "Here you go, kids: invent the car. We'll even give you a hint: Think 'cracking towers.' Extra credit to anyone who can invent the automatic transmission before gym class."

One member of the DOE panel who endorsed the 10 new programs, Steven Leinwand, wrote in 1994 that "It's time to

acknowledge that continuing to teach these skills (pencil-and-paper computational algorithms) to our students is not only unnecessary, but counterproductive and dangerous."

As the *Los Angeles Times* editorialized on November 27, even as U. S. math students consistently lag behind those of nations like Japan and the Czech Republic, which emphasize memorization, "Washington is inexplicably debating whether students should be learning the most basic of lessons: the multiplication tables."

Secretary Riley babbled the standard federal excuses. "We simply report the findings of an independent panel," he simpered. "The local decision is what is most important. The school is not in any way bound to use what we've recommended."

But if the decisions are best made at the local level (as is certainly true) and the DOE is not to be held accountable for any of its "recommendations" since they're only "advisory," then why continue dumping millions each year into this useless, counterproductive federal ant farm?

Not that Secretary Riley is telling the truth, anyway. The *Times* also reports that "In 1977, a foundation official threatened to cut off federal funds unless California education officials reversed a state mandate that third-graders memorize multiplication tables."

Professor Klein and his colleagues are to be congratulated for finally pointing out that the federal emperor has no clothes. Perhaps 20 years of the DOE has been enough.

A collection of Vin Suprynowicz's nationally syndicated essays is available in book form for \$24.95 from Huntington Press at 1-800-244-2224 or on the World Wide Web at www.thespiritof76.com.



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One educator admits that all this "is a condemnation of higher education. If we were running an automobile plant, we would be out of business." He knows, however, that most colleges and universities stopped acting like businesses a long time ago. That's because they have gone on the dole. Government subsidies are their "bottom line."

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COMMENTARY

Phonics, "Whole Language," and Literacy: The Alphabet and American Education



Thomas F. Bertonneau
Thomas Bertonneau is executive director of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics.

For decades, American educators have been engaged in debate over how to teach children to read. That such a debate would even take place is rather strange, since there has never been any particular mystery about it. At least not since man devised history's most supreme innovation in language, the alphabet.

It was the systematic nature of an alphabet that transformed ancient Greece more than 2,500 years ago. Following this development, the Greeks quickly came up with systematic philosophy, mathematics, and science—all things that did not develop where there was no alphabet.

The historian of Greek literacy, Eric Havelock, suggests that the systematic nature of alphabetic writing taught the Greeks to reorient their entire thinking on a systematic basis, and that the regularity suggested by consistent phonetic and grammatical rules inspired them to investigate the phenomenon of regularity elsewhere, in politics and nature, for example.

The steps by which one becomes literate in an alphabetic society are invariable, since they are intrinsic to the alphabet itself. Greek schoolchildren began their education by memorizing the sequence of letters; they learned the rules of combination so as to be able to sound out written words and write their own words correctly. After they had mastered these basic steps, they began to read—simple texts at first, then more sophisticated ones.

At the same time, they studied grammar. Roman children underwent the same training, and so did the boys and girls of Elizabethan London during the time of Shakespeare. Phonics is the uniquely valid way to become literate in an alphabetic society because the alphabet embodies the

phonetic content of language.

Let us now flash forward to the United States of the twenty-first century. Something called "Whole Language" has appeared in the teachings of the education professors and has become ensconced in the public schools. "Whole Language" is bound up with a host of other ideas, all of which have the same general tilt: Rules are "oppressive," order is "arbitrary," memorization "destroys spontaneity," and freeing students from discipline and form will enable them to "construct knowledge" all by themselves, without expert intervention or help.

In practice, "Whole Language" enthusiasts abolish the tried and true "break-it-up-and-sound-it-out" approach to basic spelling and word comprehension. By surrounding primary and elementary pupils with literature, by encouraging children to guess at meanings on the basis of pictures in the books or to treat words rather than letters as basic units, and by accepting "invented spelling" as the equivalent to the rule-regulated norms of orthography, the "Whole Language" teachers expect that children will, by a magical osmosis that defies explanation, acquire the same literacy as their parents and grandparents, who got theirs the old-fashioned way.

Not surprisingly, "Whole Language" does not work. Californians discovered this when the state made it the mandatory universal method in their public schools in the early 1980s, with little public debate. Within five years, California's third-graders tested as low as those in Mississippi, academically America's most backward state. The decline so alarmed state legislators that they promptly changed the law to reinstate phonics. The same thing happened in Texas.

Despite the empirical invalidation of its premises and methods, however, "Whole Language" has not gone away. Indeed, it is as tenacious as ever and we find it, for example, in Michigan public schools, often under new nomenclature that disguises its presence.

An analogy to athletic training is apt. No coach lets his team sit around the locker room without guidance in the hope that the

players will become fit, learn the skills of the game, and develop their sense of tactics by "constructing" these things out of a vacuum. The coach knows that specific exercises in a specific order develop the body for specific tasks; he knows that a regimen of precise drill prepares the team for the game.

The same holds true for intellectual development. We do not make competent readers and writers (and hence competent thinkers) any old way; we must do it by honoring the invention—the alphabet—that has permitted those who adopt it to achieve near-universal literacy, develop the sciences both theoretically and practically, and create and enjoy a rich fund of literature both classic and popular.

"Whole Language" and the ideas that support it are a utopian fantasy in rebellion against discipline. The "Whole Language" approach to reading and writing frees the teacher from the rigors of teaching phonics, just as it frees the education professors from teaching the teachers how to do it. But "Whole Language" does not, and cannot, produce literacy. Meanwhile, the indices of literacy among American school children decline or remain unacceptably low. Almost

half of college freshmen need remedial courses in English.

For these reasons, re-establishing phonics as the core of the primary school curriculum should be of primary importance to anyone truly concerned about the welfare of our children and the future of our nation.

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No Excuses

continued from page 2

pals, rigorous testing, the establishment of measurable goals, and increased parental involvement.

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COMMENTARY

Tenure Protects Good Teachers, Too



Dirk Koorstra

Dirk Koorstra is a math teacher in Zeeland Public Schools and has been in education for more than 18 years.

From time to time people bring up the idea of eliminating teacher tenure as a part of education reform. While some think tenure protects incompetent teachers, my experience has been that tenure, more often, protects good teachers from the misperceptions and politics of the job.

Teaching is a subjective profession. High school teachers begin the year with about 140 students. Each student has a unique background. The definition of success can vary dramatically from student to student. This makes it difficult to evaluate a teacher based on one student, one class, or the results of one test. There must be broader and more objective criteria for evaluating teachers.

The current Michigan Teacher Tenure Act establishes a due process for evaluating and dismissing teachers. New teachers are on probation for four years. During this time the district may release them by simply giving them a written notice with more

than 60 days left in the school year. There is a bit more work in terminating a tenured teacher, but if administrators do their job the process can be completed in one year.

Teachers need protection because reports published in the press only give a small and often misleading picture of the job a teacher (or district) really does. These public reports put a lot of pressure on administrators. They often end up with a "bottom line" mentality. The quickest way to reduce failure and dropout rates is to lower the standards. The quickest way to raise MEAP scores is to focus on the test and sacrifice other curricula. The pressure to look good on paper produces strategies that hurt real learning and student achievement. Teachers are forced to play along or face bad evaluations.

I was a victim of this process just a couple of years ago. I had a class where, despite my best efforts, 25 percent of the students failed. All the students had failed the class at least once before and all of them had the accompanying behavior problems. I put far more time and effort into that class than my "normal" classes. I was determined to get them to learn while others encouraged me to just lower the standards or fudge the grades. I kept pushing and by the end of the year 75 percent of the students passed a real class. I was given an unsatisfactory evaluation for not coming up with a way to get more students to pass.

Some of the students that I have the most impact on may only get Cs or Ds in my class. I recently ran into a student I had several years ago. She introduced me to her friends as her "math, morals, and all-around-life" teacher. I thought the buttons were going to pop off my shirt and it had nothing to do with a bunch of geometry theorems. Teachers do much more than just prepare kids for state tests.

Another situation calling for some form of protection is encounters with parents. Research strongly indicates that the number-one factor in student achievement is positive parental involvement. I believe this is true and do several things to encourage communication. However, teachers need protection from the occasional zealot.

I have had two such zealots attack me over the past 18 years. A few years ago I had my students write a paper on honesty. Shortly after the assignment was given I was called to the principal's office to explain why I was teaching values. The parent admonished us that there is no such thing as hon-

esty. Everything is relative—except for the fact that I should be fired!

The second conflict started when a family took its child out of school for a one-week vacation, which is usually not a big problem. The student did not do any assignments while she was gone, nor did she make up the work after she returned. The student ended up failing the class. The parents of course wanted me fired because I was a "bad" teacher. Thanks to tenure and supportive administrators, I still have my job.

Most veteran teachers I know have had a couple of job-threatening experiences in their career. Thanks to tenure they survived it and went on to have a positive effect on hundreds more children. There may be improvements to make regarding the technical aspects of tenure, but tenure is a good concept. Administrators can remove bad teachers if they would just use the current law. Meanwhile, the majority of teachers remain free to do their job.

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Diverse Viewpoints

Will Vouchers Leave Some Children Behind?

Vouchers Will Benefit a Few at the Expense of Many

From the moment the doors of any private school open, students are left behind. This is their nature; enrollment is selective and exclusive. With private funding this is an option, but with public funds, a crucial question must be asked: Will the common good be served?

For public schools the answer is yes, for they are inclusive. They hold all persons of equal worth and offer equal opportunity. They protect each and every student from private interests of both a religious and non-sectarian nature.

For voucher schools the answer is no, for they serve private interests. Our public school system alone serves the proud notion of the common good, an ideal fundamental to our democracy dating back to our birth as a nation.

The American experience began with Revolution-era leaders formulating a government that would best serve its future citizens. Through compromise, a system was agreed upon and a constitution ratified. The debate was contentious; at its center was the common good. The purpose of every law justly written has been to promote the common good, from the Bill of Rights onward. Though our laws at times place controversial restraints upon individuals, our present society could not endure without this notion of the common good. It is a core democratic value and a benchmark of the social studies curriculum taught to all public school students in Michigan. These values are the ties that two centuries ago bound together diverse peoples and pointed them in the direction of greatness, the modern American state, the leader of the free world.

These core democratic values have passed through generations, transmitted through public discourse, by the family, and, perhaps most importantly, by public schools. These common values are vulnerable to those who hold personal interests over the common good. We must protect this ideal and our public schools from any compromise.

There is no question as to the quality of America's free and public system of education. It is a monumental success. Our nation has the greatest economy in the world. We lead the world in many areas of technology, medical research, industry, and countless other fields. We finance freedom and humanitarian causes around the globe. Americans win Nobel prizes and other honors at a noteworthy rate. These are not signs of a failing educational system.

It is true public education faces great challenges. Through the doors of our schools pass children who lack security, proper nutrition, and health care, whose parents need treatment for drug abuse. These are children known to be at risk, yet as a nation we do not adequately provide programs necessary to counter these risks. Such children often fail in our schools. Yet they are not the failure of schools. They are a signal of the danger of the failure to provide for the common good.

Vouchers, if approved, will open a Pandora's box and will not serve the common good. A federal judge recently ruled that in Cleveland the voucher system violates a basic American value, the separation of church and state. There is concern that vouchers will stratify further an American populace already divided along economic, racial, ethnic, and religious lines. Vouchers will place a serious financial strain on Michigan's public schools, which will lose hundreds of millions of dollars while still being obliged to provide services such as special education to voucher students.

What will vouchers offer? An opportunity to attend private religious schools at public expense. Will vouchers offer a better education? There is no conclusive evidence to support this notion, and voucher schools will not be held to curricular standards set by our state government. Voucher schools will not be obliged to provide support services required of public schools to children with special needs. They will have no obligation to admit those who wish to attend. In short, they will not be responsible for the common good.

If our public school system was failing; if options were unavailable, the clamor for vouchers would be understandable. But this is not the case. Many private and religious schools as well as publicly sanctioned charter schools presently exist. What vouchers will provide is public money for private education—perhaps a religious education—outside of the oversight of public scrutiny, in schools that serve private interests rather than the common good.

Our nation is a melting pot, a statement of truth both profound and significant. We must not become Lincoln's house divided by creating isolated communities within our nation. In the words of Martin Luther King, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish as fools." The common good was a worthy goal in 1776. It is a worthy goal in the year 2000. It is a core value of our American democracy. It is at the heart of the American public school experience, an experience that has helped create a great and formidable nation.

Lee Burton is in his twenty-third year of teaching for the Hartland Consolidated Schools. In 1979-80 he received the Outstanding Young Educator Award and in 1991 was named Elementary Reading Teacher of the Year by the Michigan Reading Association.



Lee Burton

YES



Bill Harlan

NO

All Parents Want to Improve Their Children's Education

Opponents of K-12 school vouchers believe allowing parents to choose their children's schools will foster a system that "leaves some children behind."

The concern seems to be that the children who take advantage of vouchers will be the best and the brightest and that when they depart, only the poor and the slow will be left, to be ill-served by a second-rate public system.

But under the voucher plan currently being proposed for Michigan, only students attending failing schools will be afforded the opportunity to use a voucher to attend another school. Do voucher opponents dislike the idea of parents finally being able to do something about poor quality schools? Or are they happy with a situation in which everyone is forced by the system to stay at the same, mediocre level?

Are we after academic excellence or academic leveling? Is an education system that teaches everyone at the same academic level the only "just" one? Or would it be more just to give the gifted a chance to do better?

Even public educators have rejected "academic democracy," a notion prevalent in the 1960s and 70s. In the ensuing two decades they have established many programs for "gifted and talented" students, with no detectable damage to our democratic values. Do voucher opponents believe students not enrolled in "gifted and talented" programs have been "left behind?"

Of course, everything I have said so far takes the voucher opponents' assertion at face value: namely, that only the best and the brightest students will use vouchers to leave failing schools. Even if that is the case, what is wrong with gifted students having a chance to fully develop their gifts?

However, the best and brightest students are not necessarily the only ones who will use vouchers. Why would parents of the best students take advantage of an opportunity to improve their children's education, while parents of poorly performing students yawn at the chance to improve what the public schools have failed to fix?

Voucher opponents seem to believe parents of poorly performing students don't really care about the quality of education their children receive, and would therefore not take advantage of a voucher. On the other hand, they seem to think that parents of the smarter students are the ones who do care, and therefore would use a voucher.

While it is agreed that there may be some statistically significant convergence—good parents/good student, bad parents/bad student—I see no reason why this *must* be the case, much less why it should be true in the majority of cases.

In fact, I would go so far as to say that all parents—whether of gifted students,

poor academic performers, or all shades in between—would leap at the chance to be able to shop around, find out which school best fits their child's needs, and send their child there.

Vouchers would enable parents to take their education dollars (previously confiscated by the state as taxes) and go shopping. If parents wish to enroll their child in an alternative school, or a Montessori School, or an excellent public school across town, or in a school that otherwise delivers instruction in a manner consistent with the parents' ethical, moral, or religious beliefs, then so be it.

Unfortunately, to some, including many in the public school system, that last idea is beyond anathema: It is their most dreaded nightmare. Why? Because, for whatever reason, they seem to believe parents are incompetent to decide where their own children should go to school. To them, the state has become some sort of omnipotent power that is supposed to make all the great decisions for everyone.

What too many people in today's public school system have forgotten is that parents—not the state—have primary responsibility for educating their children. If the state is entrusted with that job, it is only because parents first entrusted the state with it. If the state fails to do the job, then parents can reclaim their educational responsibility at any time.

Which is better for the common good? All the children in a failing school having to stay there because there are no choices? Or all of those children being given the opportunity to use vouchers to find schools best suited to their unique human needs?

I think the answer is obvious.

Bill Harlan has taught mathematics and history for six years at The International School (est. 1966) in Farmington Hills, Michigan. He holds a master of arts in teaching from Wayne State University and a bachelor's degree in marketing from Michigan State University.



Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of *Michigan Education Report*. Tell us what you think: "Will Vouchers Leave Some Children Behind?" Send your comments to

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