

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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News and analysis for educators, parents, and policy makers

Early Fall 2000

SHORT SUBJECTS

The U.S. Supreme Court approved the spending of federal money for computers in religious schools. Because the decision allows public money to flow indirectly to religious schools, the 6-3 decision may shed light on how the Court would rule on publicly funded vouchers. **See related story on page 4.**

The National Education Association approved a \$7 million dues increase at its July meeting to wage political battles in various states, including Michigan. Each of the NEA's more than 2 million members will be required to pay an additional \$5 in dues to fight school choice efforts throughout the nation. **See related story on page 3.**

Competition spurs public schools in Michigan to improve, says a recently released report. The report includes case studies of how public school districts in Michigan's most populous county are responding to competition from charter schools and public "schools-of-choice." **See related story, right.**

New York City privatizes its worst public schools. By fall 2001, Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy hopes to convert roughly 50 struggling public schools into charter schools to be managed by private companies or nonprofit agencies. Seven charter schools converted from public schools opened this fall, joining the city's existing eight charter schools.

Michigan businesses and institutions of higher learning spend over \$600 million to teach basic skills to high school graduates. A recent report from the Mackinac Center for Public Policy reveals the economic cost of having to provide post-secondary remedial education, but notes that the human cost is incalculably higher. Community forums to discuss the report's findings are being held throughout the state. For more information, visit the Mackinac Center's Web site at www.mackinac.org.

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Group promotes professionalism for teachers

Says educators deserve more career choices

Most reports about the state of modern education focus on many parents' dissatisfaction with the public school system. But it seems that an increasing number of teachers also are growing frustrated with what they see as an unwieldy education bureaucracy.

"The limitations of the current system have caused many fine educators to leave teaching altogether," says Senn Brown, a member of the board of the Association of

Educators in Private Practice (AEPP).

AEPP, a group that seeks to put teachers on a par with other professionals such as lawyers or doctors, notes that other professionals have more choices for how they practice their professions. Established in 1990, AEPP seeks to expand entrepreneurial opportunities for educators—such as online tutoring, charter school management, textbook publishing, and education-related consulting—

by providing resources and support to its nearly 1,000 members and expanding community of education entrepreneurs.

According to Executive Director Chris Yelich, "The traditional path for professional growth in education was to go into administration, but that wasn't the choice that some educators wanted to make. AEPP wanted to provide a network for these entrepreneurs." **AEPP continued on page 2**



Students attending the Potter's House school in Grand Rapids with the help of private scholarships sing for their benefactors at Children First CEO America's sixth annual Investors Summit.

Private scholarships expand opportunities for low-income families

State, national groups help poor students choose better schools

In May, more than 100 business leaders, philanthropists, and others gathered in Grand Rapids for the sixth annual Investors Summit meeting of Children First CEO America, the nation's largest provider of "opportunity scholarships"—partial scholarships for children of low-income parents, financed by private-sector contributors.

In attendance were representatives from prominent corporations, foundations, and public interest groups, all committed to helping low-income families afford to choose other schools if the local public school to which their children are assigned is failing.

Community leaders Dick and Betsy DeVos hosted the meeting, which opened with testimony by Jacqueline Robinson, a Detroit mother of seven whose children have benefited from opportunity scholarships. When Robinson and her husband decided on private schooling for their family, they were faced with tuition bills that would have eaten up two-thirds of their yearly income.

SCHOLARSHIPS continued on page 2

Competition spurs public school improvement

Wayne County districts work to attract students

Increased choice and competition in Michigan's public school system is providing many districts with powerful incentives to improve—incentives that decades of increased spending and additional regulations could not provide, according to a report released in August by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

"For some districts, making parents happy isn't just good public relations anymore," say report authors Matthew Ladner, Ph.D., president of Capitol Research and Consulting in Texas, and Matthew Brouillette, director of education policy at the Mackinac Center. "It has come to mean survival and prosperity."

The report examines how school districts in Michigan's largest county are responding to competition from charter schools and the public "schools-of-choice" program, which allows students to attend other public schools in their own and neighboring districts. The evidence shows that rather than harming the cause of better education, limited competition among public schools has resulted in a more customer-oriented focus in some districts.

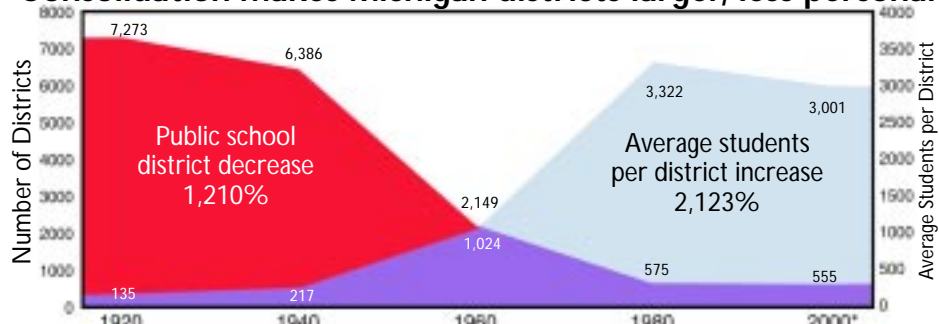
One of the districts highlighted—Dearborn City School District—sprang into

action when it faced competition from four charter schools within the district and additional charter schools and public "schools-of-choice" in adjoining districts. "Rather than waiting for students to leave the district for charter schools or neighboring districts," says Dr. Ladner, "Dearborn created a popular 'Theme Schools and Academies Program' which allows schools to develop

COMPETITION continued on page 2

Education at a Glance

Consolidation makes Michigan districts larger, less personal



Surveys show parents prefer smaller school districts where they believe they have greater influence over their children's education. Despite this fact, consolidation of Michigan school districts has caused the number of districts to drop from 7,273 in 1920 to just 555 today, dramatically increasing the number of students per district.

Source: Michigan Department of Education

* Does not include Public School Academies

AEPP

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and to give them support to succeed."

Only a few years ago, most educators did not think of education as an "industry." Recently, however, the concept of "educator-as-entrepreneur" has begun to catch on. Yelich attributes this development to heightened interest in greater parental choices in education, as well as to rising investor interest in education-related businesses. Charter schools also have expanded entrepreneurial opportunities for educators by improving the climate for outsourcing school services, including instruction.

According to Yelich, the role of AEPP is to help bridge "the language gap" between educators and the business world. "Many of our entrepreneurial educators don't know

systems to assist special education students," she says. "In addition, we help adults with disabilities prepare for the job market by teaching them basic skills necessary to become licensed or complete a college degree."

Master points out that AEPP is committed to supplementing, not replacing, the existing education system. "We aren't trying to replace the school system," she says. "Our role is to meet a need that currently is not being met or to supplement already successful programs."

The success of AEPP over the past decade suggests that teachers increasingly want career opportunities beyond the traditional school setting. This fall, AEPP and the Institute for the Transformation of Learning



More than 400 people attended AEPP's most recent "EdVentures" conference, a three-day convention of informational seminars and presentations for educators who wish to become active participants in the developing education economy.

the lingo of the companies," she says. "They might have a great idea, but they don't necessarily know how to make a business plan. We help them make connections with members of the business community and help turn their idea into reality."

In July, the AEPP held its annual "EdVentures" conference in Detroit with more than 400 people in attendance. Three days of informational seminars and presentations provided interested educators with contacts, resources, and support to become active participants in the developing education economy.

Lynne Master, founder and president of the Learning Disabilities Clinic, Inc. in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, says AEPP-sponsored events like EdVentures provide networking opportunities in a cooperative environment. An AEPP member since 1993, Master says her first EdVentures conference "was like an epiphany for me as a private business owner. I thought I was alone as an education provider and had no idea of the existence of others who had left the classroom but remained in the education world."

Master finds AEPP to be an invaluable source for teachers who want to become successful educator/business people. "Training for an education business certainly was never offered in my college of education."

Master's Learning Disabilities Clinic provides services to both children and adults with learning and attention disorders. "We work in close collaboration with existing schools and

at Marquette University will host "Teachers Want Choices Too," an initiative to promote "new professional avenues of empowerment, autonomy, ownership and accountability for enterprising educators."

Fifty educators and policy leaders will gather in Racine, Wisconsin, to craft a "Teachers Want Choices Too" policy statement and to develop a strategic plan for pursuing their agenda.

"It's my hope that the original vision that led to the creation of the AEPP will play out in ways that enhance teaching and the teaching profession," says Brown. "Private practice can be an important option for attracting and retaining teachers who seek autonomy, who thrive on accountability and can accept the risks involved."

"More importantly, these changes can expand instructional offerings and enhance learning opportunities for students," he adds.

Yelich believes America is on the verge of a "sea change" in how education is delivered. "In the last 10 years, we have seen a new way of thinking emerge about educating children," she says. "Education choices are no longer limited to what is happening within the school building; entrepreneurs have created many avenues for choices. We want to continue to see education options improve for students and professional options increase for teachers."

For more information about AEPP or "Teachers Want Choices Too," visit www.aepp.org.

Scholarships

continued from page 1

"We want to give our children the best as parents, but that's difficult to do when you don't have choices," said Robinson.

Choice came to the Robinsons through the Education Freedom Fund, the Michigan affiliate of Children First CEO America. Children First began in 1992 as the Children's Education Opportunity Foundation of San Antonio, or CEO San Antonio, with business and policy leaders providing scholarships.

CEO San Antonio was based on an Indiana scholarship program begun by Indianapolis businessman J. Patrick Rooney in 1991. After watching the Indiana legislature dismiss a voucher proposal, Rooney decided to act.

Responding to what he saw as a strong desire for educational choice on the part of parents, Rooney offered tuition aid to 500 low-income families who would have had no other options.

The satisfaction of providing hope to many who had none encouraged Dr. James Leininger and Fritz Stieger to launch CEO San Antonio the following year. Again, the response to partial scholarships exceeded expectations, allowing the organization to expand scholarships across Texas, and possibly beyond.

Things haven't slowed down since.

In early 1994, with the help of a \$2 million private grant, the Foundation set up a national body, CEO America. Now known as Children First America, it provides support services, information, and funding for programs nationwide. Today, there are over 70 private scholarship programs across the country.

"What was once a 'fringe' issue, has now turned into a mainstream issue with broad-based support from all across the country," says Children First President Fritz Steiger.

The Michigan chapter of the organization had its beginnings in 1991, when then-Senate Majority Leader Dick Posthumus established the Vandenberg Foundation, a privately funded scholarship program aimed at giving low-income parents a choice in their children's education. In 1993, it became CEO Michigan and then in 1999 the name changed to the Education Freedom Fund (EFF).

EFF and programs like it operate on the premise that all parents, regardless of income, should have the opportunity to choose where their children go to school. While some parents can afford to send their

children to private school or are able to move to a better school district, this choice is not available to parents with low incomes—the ones who need this option most.

EFF scholarships are awarded to children in grades K-8 from low-income families who qualify for the federal government's free or reduced lunch program. Recipients receive an average of \$1,000 annually and their parents must provide a portion (at least \$500) of private-school tuition; in Michigan this averages around \$3,000.

In 1991, the foundation awarded just three scholarships. By 1999, this number had skyrocketed to more than 4,000. This month, EFF will award over 4,250 scholarships for the 2000-2001 school year.

The latest boost was a matching grant of \$7.5 million from Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF), a nationwide trust set up by two philanthropists in 1998. This grant enabled EFF to award over 3,700 Michigan schoolchildren four-year scholarships in 1999. Despite the requirement that parents pay a portion of tuition, parents of one in five eligible children in Michigan nevertheless applied for a scholarship in 1999. More than 60,000 children were placed on a waiting list.

"EFF knows low-income families are every bit as concerned about quality education as anyone else. Our goal is to help more parents like Jacqueline Robinson who want a better education for their children but can't afford it without our help," says Executive Director Kevin Stotts.

Nationwide, the numbers are similar. CSF, which awarded 40,000 scholarships in 1999 with private donations of \$170 million, received 1.25 million applications.

"Think of it: 1.25 million applicants asking to pay \$1,000 a year over four years. That's \$5 billion that poor families were willing to spend simply to escape the schools where their children have been relegated and to secure a decent education," says CSF chairman Ted Forstmann.

Jacqueline Robinson is thankful for the EFF scholarships, which she says answered her family's prayers. She explains, "I find it strange that people feel that you should have a choice about minor things in life . . . but yet, when it comes to education, there are those that tell us that parents should not have choices."

Competition

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specialized programs to satisfy the diverse preferences of parents and students." The program's offerings include character education, creative arts, engineering technology, history, and others. The result: Instead of losing enrollment to its competition, Dearborn enrollment has increased from 14,229 in 1994-95 to 16,263 in 1998-99.

"Dearborn has created a mechanism for a degree of parental choice in education within the context of a government school district," Dr. Ladner said. Dr. Jeremy Hughes, superintendent of the Dearborn district, stated "We welcome competition. The reforms we've enacted would not have happened, at least not as fast, without competition."

Dearborn is just one example of the positive impact of competition on Michigan school districts, says the report. Others, such as the Inkster district near Detroit, had been serving its students poorly and losing enrollment for decades. By the end of the 1990s it was surrounded by six charter schools. When its very survival was threatened by a proposed state takeover, district leaders finally sought a contract with Edison Schools, a private company that runs public schools across the nation. Now, there seems to be some promise for Inkster.

"Only time will tell whether or not Edison can rescue the district," says Brouillette. "However, it required a competitive environment to force action to be taken, where before a bad situation was al-

lowed to fester."

According to the report, some districts have met the challenge with improved services, while others have had to absorb the "opportunity cost" of failing to attract additional students. Some districts have made changes to prepare for additional competition in the future, while others are taking a more reactive approach. Nevertheless, although fewer than 5 percent of Michigan public school students are able to take advantage of these school choice options, competition for students among Michigan's K-12 schools has improved educational opportunities for children and encouraged schools to respond to the needs and demands of families.

"As the citizens of Michigan consider giving parents more choices in how and where their children are educated, they must recognize how public schools respond when they must improve or face the possibility of going out of business," says Brouillette. "Competition has been that missing element in most school reform measures. It provides the most powerful incentive for schools to improve while expanding the ability of parents to choose the best and safest school for their children."

Copies of the report, *The Impact of Limited School Choice on Public School Districts*, are available from the Mackinac Center for Public Policy at (517) 631-0900 or at www.mackinac.org.

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College bound students receive new state scholarships

ACLU suing over criteria for 'Merit Award' program

Nearly 30,000 Michigan students will receive publicly funded vouchers to use for college expenses this year. But court challenges and controversy may place the future of the scholarship program in jeopardy.

This year marks the beginning of the Michigan Merit Award program. High school seniors who met eligibility requirements based on Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores will receive a \$1,000 to \$2,500 scholarship from the state to apply toward college or technical training. This year, approximately 40,000 Michigan seniors were eligible to receive awards for this fall.

Michigan Treasurer Mark Murray told *The Detroit News*, "These awards will be put to good use this fall as thousands of qualifying students begin the next phase of their education."

The Merit Award program is administered by the state Department of Treasury and is funded through the \$8.5-billion national tobacco industry settlement slated for Michigan.

Students who take MEAP tests and meet or exceed Michigan's standard scores in one of four subject areas (math, reading, science, and writing) qualify to receive the merit scholarships in grades 7, 8, and 11. Students can also qualify by passing two of the MEAP subject areas and placing in the 75th percentile or above on the ACT or SAT or by obtaining a qualifying score on the ACT Work Keys job-skills assessment. Eligible students must be planning to go on with some form of postsecondary education and not have been convicted of a felony.

Scholarships worth \$2,500 are provided for students who plan to attend a college or job-training program in Michigan, while students who choose to attend an out-of-state institution receive \$1,000. The schol-

arships may be used for any college-related expenses, from tuition to day care.

The Merit Award program is not without its critics, however.

Some are questioning the validity of MEAP testing as a measure of academic achievement. Others are challenging the fairness of scholarship distribution.

In June, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed suit against the program, claiming it is biased against minorities and poor students who tend to fare poorly on MEAP tests. The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Detroit, seeks an injunction ordering the state to expand the criteria for scholarships.

The lawsuit came on the heels of an announcement showing that Michigan's most affluent school districts collected the largest share of Merit Award scholarships. The ACLU charges that the program subsidizes students who already can afford college and leaves needy students behind. Responses from government officials have stressed that the program is meant to be merit-based; all students take the same tests and are held to uniform standards. Supporters of the plan have also suggested there are many scholarships already established to serve needy and minority students.

Controversy also surrounds the MEAP itself. In Michigan as well as other states, doubts about standardized testing are being raised.

One criticism is that standardized testing leads to standardized teaching, otherwise known as "teaching to the test." Superintendent Ryan Donlan of Bay-Arenac Community High School explains, "Nothing on the tests is bad, per se. But, it is unethical and abhorrent for teachers to simply teach to the test," he says. "Success in four or five academic areas on a test does not assure the student is a well-rounded person."

"True success must be measured by taking into account transferable employability skills, like problem solving, teambuilding, and punctuality," he adds.

The ACLU lawsuit will have no effect on this year's Merit Award recipients, but could curtail or expand the awards for students in the 2000-2001 school year.

More information on the Merit Award program can be found at www.meritaward.state.mi.us.

Supreme Court: MEA must return \$150,000 in dues

Teachers improperly charged fee for union politicking

A recent verdict by the U.S. Supreme Court will force the state's largest school employees' union, the Michigan Education Association (MEA), and its parent organization, the National Education Association (NEA), to return to members some \$150,000 in union dues illegally seized from 1991 to 2000 for use in political activity.

The court settlement brings to an end a class action lawsuit, *Bromley v. MEA*, filed on behalf of 18 teachers and professors in 1992. The settlement orders MEA and NEA officials to return to 450 teachers dues money that funded union activities not related to collective bargaining.

The settlement also requires union officials to stop forcing members who object to underwrite union non-bargaining-related activities. This will reduce the amount of dues the teachers must pay in the future.

In a 1991 Supreme Court decision, *Lehnert v. Ferris Faculty Association*, the court ruled that an employee who objects to funding his union's political or other non-collective bargaining activities cannot be forced by the union to pay for those activities. Despite this ruling, MEA officials continued to violate teachers' rights, prompting the *Bromley v. MEA* lawsuit, which challenged the union's calculation of how much of the teachers' dues was used for political and other non-bargaining-related activities.

Many teachers and other union members disagree with the positions their unions take with regard to various causes and political issues. But most union members are unaware that they can redirect the money they are forced to pay to the union for non-bargaining activities. According to Robert Hunter, director of labor policy for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, "There are a variety of ways under current labor laws to protect objecting union workers from financially supporting union spending on non-workplace-related activities."

Hunter is author of a recent study on the options available to workers who have religiously based objections to either union membership or payment of dues to a union. In the report, entitled *Religious Liberty and Compulsory Unionism: A Worker's Guide to Using Union Dues for Charity*, Hunter points out that such workers "can divert some or all of their dues money to charitable orga-

nizations and still be protected on the job."

Federal law enforcement authorities are beginning to investigate longstanding examples of union abuse of worker rights. For example, the Internal Revenue Service and Federal Election Commission are considering a probe into political spending by the NEA, with whom the MEA is affiliated. Although the NEA's reports to the IRS claim that no union dues are spent on politics, other NEA documents, uncovered by *The Associated Press*, show otherwise.

The NEA's 1998-2000 budget allocated \$4.9 million to be spent on a "national political strategy" in the 2000 election that involves "candidate recruitment, independent expenditures, early voting, and vote-by-mail programs in order to strengthen support for pro-public education candidates and ballot measures."

The NEA also has failed to report previous political expenditures, including large contributions to state-based school employees' unions, slated for "electing education-friendly candidates" who oppose school voucher and charter school initiatives.

In a complaint to the IRS, the public interest law group Landmark Legal Foundation recently submitted complaints against the NEA, alleging that the union "has made improper contributions to federal campaigns" and that it "is spending substantial general operating funds on taxable political activities, which it has not reported on its tax returns for the last several years."

The complaint to the IRS further states that: "for several years the NEA has failed to disclose the full extent of its political activities and expenditures as required by the Internal Revenue Code. As a result, the NEA appears to have submitted inaccurate tax returns that understate its taxable income."

The lawsuit calls on the IRS to conduct a comprehensive investigation to determine the full extent of the NEA's political activities and expenditures. The NEA claims it is in compliance with the law.

Religious Liberty and Compulsory Unionism: A Worker's Guide to Using Union Dues for Charity is available on the Internet at www.mackinac.org or by calling 800-22-IDEAS.

The complaints filed against the NEA by the Landmark Legal Foundation can be viewed at www.landmarklegal.org.


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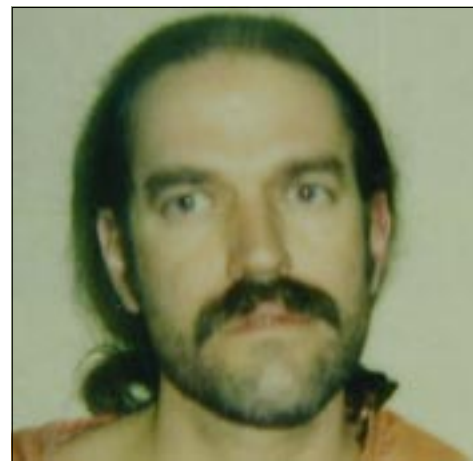
Court case continues against MEA

Union rep charged with negligence in superintendent's murder

The Michigan State Court of Appeals decided last fall that a Michigan Education Association (MEA) representative may have failed to do enough to warn a school superintendent that a distressed and armed teacher was coming to kill him.

The lawsuit, which began in a Washtenaw Circuit Court, alleges that MEA representative Mark Jenkins could have prevented the death of Chelsea Schools Superintendent Joseph Piasecki had he adequately warned Piasecki of impending danger. The suit, citing negligence, was filed by Marlene Piasecki, widow of the slain superintendent, against the Michigan Education Association and seeks in excess of \$25,000.

On Dec. 16, 1993, Chelsea chemistry teacher Stephen Leith left a grievance hearing at the high school, obtained a handgun, returned to the school, and shot and killed Piasecki. Two others were shot and wounded by Leith, who had previously been disciplined for behavioral problems. Leith is currently serving a life sentence for



Former teacher Stephen Leith is serving a life sentence for the 1993 murder of Chelsea Schools Superintendent Joseph Piasecki.

Piasecki's murder.

Minutes before the shooting, Leith's wife called MEA representative Mark Jenkins to warn him of her husband's plans. Although Jenkins eventually called Piasecki

to tell him there was a possibility that Leith was on his way back to the grievance hearing, he is accused of not informing Piasecki that the distraught teacher was armed. This omission led to Piasecki's death, according to Anthony Patti, attorney for Marlene Piasecki.

Although the Washtenaw Circuit Court judge dismissed the claims against the MEA, the case was submitted to the Michigan State Court of Appeals, where judges overturned one of the dismissed claims. The Appeals decision gave the widow a green light to continue with the suit.

"The ruling certainly is a victory," Patti told *The Detroit News*. "The family is looking forward to having its day in court and this will allow it."

The case will continue to the Michigan Supreme Court, where justices will decide whether or not to review the case. If reviewed, the case may return to the Washtenaw Circuit Court for a jury trial.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Education savings accounts become law

Gov. Engler approved a bill in June that will allow parents to make tax-deductible contributions to savings accounts designated for higher education expenses. The bill passed the House and Senate in May by unanimous votes.

The minimum investment to start an education savings account is \$25, and there are no regular deposits required to maintain the account. Contributions up to \$5,000 per taxpayer—\$10,000 per joint tax return—may be deducted from state taxes every year. Deposits are limited to \$125,000 per year. The accounts may be used to cover any post-high school education costs, including tuition, room and board, class fees, and books.

The education accounts will be available in early 2001, according to the Michigan Department of Treasury.

Governor signs record school funding increase

Michigan's new K-12 school-aid budget includes the largest per-pupil funding increase in state history. Signed in July by Gov. Engler, the budget will increase funding from the current amount of \$5,700 to \$6,700 per pupil by 2003. The bill increases school spending from \$10.3 billion to \$11.9 billion by 2003.

The school-aid budget allows for expansion of cross-district schools-of-

choice programs, which let public school students attend a school in any contiguous school district that will accept them.

However, the budget also contains a clause that threatens to reduce per-pupil public school funding if Proposal 1 is passed in November. The ballot proposal would allow parents in failing public school districts to use a state-funded voucher for their child's education at a non-public school.

\$45 million for "parents as teachers" approved

Also included in the education budget is \$45 million in grants to school districts for "parental childhood development training." Supporters of the bill call it the "parents as teachers" program.

Under the program, school districts that draft proposals for reaching new parents will receive a grant from the state. To be eligible, programs must teach parental skills and track students as they enter school. The schools must also visit involved parents' homes.

The program's aim is to teach skills that can be used to prepare children for school. However, critics argue that school districts typically rush to do as little as possible and still meet the requirements necessary to get their hands on the money provided by such programs.

Charter school bill tabled until fall

The legislature will resume its debate over Michigan's charter school cap after

entering session in late September. The bill increasing the number of charter schools that can be set up by public colleges and universities in Michigan was tabled before the summer recess.

Michigan currently has 173 charter schools, serving approximately 50,000 students. Seven out of 10 charter schools in Michigan carry waiting lists. The Michigan cap on charters limits the number of university-chartered schools to 150; and only 23 of Michigan's charter schools have been chartered by other means. Local school districts and community colleges can authorize charters, but few choose to do so. The bill would increase the cap by 25 every year, until it reached 225 in 2002.

Gov. Engler has voiced frustration with the stalemate over the bill. In May, Central Michigan University opened a new national charter school research center, the Charter Schools Development & Performance Institute. The irony of Michigan housing the national charter research center, while the Legislature refuses to allow more charters to exist, has disappointed Engler and other charter school advocates.

Charters not exempted from high construction costs

State Attorney General Jennifer Granholm ruled on July 19 that charter schools are subject to the state's prevailing wage law, which mandates that government construction projects pay contractors ac-

ording to higher union wages. The ruling could dramatically increase the costs of construction for charter schools.

Granholm's opinion came in response to a question from State Rep. Michael Hanley. Granholm said that since charter schools receive public money, they are subject to the Prevailing Wage Act.

Charter schools must now seek bids for all construction or renovation costs exceeding \$12,500.

In 1999, State Rep. Wayne Kuipers introduced a bill to repeal the prevailing wage law, which he said adds an estimated 10 percent to the final cost of construction projects.

James Kos, superintendent of Hamilton Public Schools, thinks the prevailing wage law should be repealed for all schools. Hamilton is in the process of building multiple facilities costing about \$36 million.

"If the prevailing wage act had not been in effect, we'd have been able to save a significant amount of money," Kos told *MER*. Original projections estimated a savings between one and \$1.5 million in construction costs. "That's money we could have used for students."

Associated Builders and Contractors, a nonunion builders organization, is currently suing the state to get the law declared unconstitutional.

2000 a banner year for education issues

Voters, courts, candidates wrestle with school choice

Across the country, education is the focus of ballot measures, court decisions, and local, state, and national elections.

In California, a school voucher initiative has qualified for the state's Nov. 7 ballot. The proposal would offer at least \$4,000 to all students to spend on tuition at the school of their choice, including private and religious schools. It also would allow, but not require, the Legislature to increase annual per-pupil spending by nearly \$1,000 per year to meet the national average.

"When this initiative passes, schools will be accountable to parents and grandparents, and this accountability will improve California's failing educational system," Tim Draper, one of the campaign's largest contributors, told *The Sacramento Bee*.

The California teachers' unions and Gov. Gray Davis are the initiative's leading opponents. They assert that the proposal will drain money from public schools and create a new class of schools that are not subject to the state's education standards.

On June 28, the U.S. Supreme Court approved the spending of federal money for computers in religious schools. Because the ruling allows public money to flow indirectly to religious schools, the 6-3 decision was hailed by school-choice supporters as a step toward constitutionally supported vouchers.

Writing for the majority, Justice Clarence Thomas explained that "the principles of neutrality and private choice" should be the only touchstones for channeling aid to religious schools. He said "nothing in the Establishment Clause requires the exclusion of pervasively sectarian schools from otherwise permissible aid programs."

The decision finalizes a 15-year-old case that began in Louisiana. Under a Louisiana program, federal money flows through public school districts, which are obligated to buy computer equipment and distribute it to all schools within the district's geographic boundaries—public, private and parochial—based on enrollment.

Cleveland is also facing a court battle

over its school-choice program. The U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals heard arguments in June on the constitutionality of the Cleveland school-voucher program. Opponents of the program, including the state's two largest teachers' unions, argue that vouchers violate the separation of church and state.

Approximately 3,600 students in Cleveland receive state funding to attend a school of their choice. A federal trial judge threw out the voucher program last year after more than 90 percent of the participants signed up to attend parochial schools. But the U.S. Supreme Court stayed an injunction that would have effectively ended the program until the 6th Circuit could consider an appeal.

In defense of vouchers, Edward B. Foley, a lawyer from the Ohio Attorney General's office, argued that the state was not intentionally pouring money into religious schools, since the voucher recipients can choose any school, regardless of religious affiliation.

Foley told the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, "The parents have complete choice. They are in the driver's seat."

The three-judge panel refused a request to expedite the ruling, meaning it could be months, or over a year, before the case is finally settled.

According to recent polls, education is the top issue for voters in this presidential election. Both Republican presidential hopeful George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore are actively campaigning on educational issues and polls rate both candidates equally in their abilities to deal with education. Voters seem willing to support accountability programs or radical reforms, such as Gore's plan to shut down and reform failing schools or Bush's voucher proposal.

In Florida, a school voucher program is facing a court challenge of its constitutionality; but the entire issue may have been rendered moot due to recently released state school "grades."

EDUCATION continued on page 9

OK for school boards to denounce voucher proposal

But state will fine districts that use public resources on politics

The Michigan Department of State announced in August that school boards do not violate state law when they pass resolutions against Proposal 1, a school voucher initiative that will appear on the November ballot.

Secretary of State Candice Miller made it clear, however, that public school officials are not allowed to use public funds or resources to support or oppose any ballot question.

This decision follows a July 24 ruling that the Grand Haven, Kearsley, and Oakland Intermediate school districts violated election laws by using public resources to criticize Proposal 1. Employees in these districts used presentations, e-mails, and postal resources to voice their opposition to the initiative. The state warned that it is prepared to fine districts if these activities continue.

ALL Kids First!, a group that opposes vouchers, says 76 school boards so far have passed resolutions against Proposal 1.

This State Department's announcement nevertheless was seen as a boost for Kids First! Yes!, the ballot committee promoting Proposal 1. The committee recently received endorsements from Oklahoma Rep. J.C. Watts, Michigan Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus, and the Catholic Campaign for America. Watts, attending a town hall meet-

ing in Holland, said Proposal 1 offers "a visionary renewal of public education." Posthumus broke ranks with Gov. Engler to support the measure.

The Michigan Catholic Church has contributed \$765,000 to the pro-voucher campaign, \$450,000 of which came from the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Meanwhile, ALL Kids First! picked up the support of the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce and former Gov. James Blanchard, who was named as an honorary chair of the anti-school choice group. Other honorary chairs are State Board of Education President Dorothy Beardmore and Dr. Charles G. Adams, former president of the Detroit NAACP.

ALL Kids First! has received over \$500,000 in contributions from individuals and organizations across Michigan. The 2.5 million-member National Education Association school employees' union earmarked \$750,000 in its 1999-2000 budget to assist ALL Kids First!'s efforts to defeat Proposal 1. At its recent convention, the NEA also approved a dues increase on members to raise an additional \$7.5 million, much of which will be used to oppose voucher initiatives in states such as Michigan and California.

What Is Proposal 1?

The State Board of Canvassers agreed in mid-August to the following language for Proposal 1:

A proposal to amend the Constitution to permit the state to provide indirect support to students attending nonpublic pre-elementary, elementary and secondary schools; allow the use of tuition vouchers in certain school districts, and require enactment of teacher testing laws.

The proposed constitutional amendment would:

1. Eliminate the ban on indirect support of students attending nonpublic schools through tuition vouchers, credits, tax benefits, exemptions or deductions, subsidies, grants or loans of public monies or property.
2. Allow students to use tuition vouchers to attend nonpublic schools in districts with a graduation rate under 2/3 in 1998-1999 and districts approving tuition vouchers through school board action or a public vote. Each voucher would be limited to 1/2 of state average per-pupil public school revenue.
3. Require teacher testing on academic subjects in public schools and in nonpublic schools redeeming tuition vouchers.
4. Adjust minimum per-pupil funding from 1994-1995 to 2000-2001 level.

Should this proposal be adopted? Yes or No

UP school board rescinds plan to boost classroom spending

Union intimidation cited as factor in 3-2 vote

A small rural school district became the battleground in August between a local school board and the Michigan Education Association (MEA) union when the school board approved parts of a "School Excellence Plan" designed to cut the district's costs and channel more resources into the classroom.

The latest skirmish came when union intimidation caused one school board member to call a special Aug. 17 meeting where the recently approved portions of the plan were rescinded on a 3-2 vote.

"This is a sad day for Arvon Township children," said Mary Rogala, president of Arvon Township Schools, a small one-school district in the Upper Peninsula's Baraga County. "The union does not care how many children are hurt as long as it means full employment and benefits for its members."

The Arvon Township district employs a staff of four, all of whom are MEA members. Three of the four work part-time, but all have a comprehensive health insurance package that costs the small, 15-student district nearly \$9,000 per year per employee. The insurance is provided by the Michigan Education Special Services Association, a subsidiary of the MEA, the state's largest union of public school cooks, janitors, teachers, and bus drivers.

The approved parts of the School Excellence Plan called for the district to explore cost savings by requesting bids from private companies to provide non-instructional support services. After an open bidding process, the district found it could save 32 percent of its budget for transportation, food service, and janitorial services and dedicate \$32,400 more to classroom instruction. Private companies had also agreed to hire two of the three employees who would be affected by the change.

At its Aug. 15 meeting, the board approved contracting for these services and voted to use the anticipated savings to increase the library fund from \$300 to \$5,000, to allocate \$10,000 for foreign language and music instruction, and to use \$5,000 to enhance the science and computer labs.

Prior to the meeting, union employees sent a letter to township residents accusing the school board of endangering children. The union also served the school board president with a lawsuit seeking an injunction against the School Excellence Plan.

Board members report that, after the meeting, when a majority of members approved parts of the plan, union operatives harassed at least one board member. This board member subsequently called the special Aug. 17 meeting to reverse his vote, thereby rescinding the new School Excellence Plan measures.

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy, publisher of *Michigan Education Report*, assisted the school board in its decision to pursue these elements of its School Excellence Plan. Board president Rogala said the district will continue to evaluate its options in order to provide better learning opportunities for students.

Education privacy law strengthened

Students lead fight to keep school records confidential

On May 1, Gov. John Engler signed a bill to protect the privacy of student education records, the result of a four-year effort by Midland high school students.

The bill amends Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to specifically prohibit the unauthorized release of student education records under the Act. The federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), passed in 1974, already prohibits such unauthorized disclosures. Unfortunately, before the amendment was passed, Michigan's Freedom of Information Act did not specifically prohibit the release of such confidential information, creating a loophole officials apparently felt safe to abuse.

The bill was introduced by State Sen. Bill Schuette in response to a series of illegal releases of student records by the Midland Public Schools. The releases were related to incidents involving disciplinary actions and conflicts between students and coaches and teaching staff. Suddenly, Midland students began to hear that their education records were being released to the public by the district in response to Freedom of Information Act requests. Neither the students nor their parents had authorized the release of these records. In most cases, they did not even know such records existed.

Upon further investigation it was determined that hundreds of pages of federally protected documents had been released by the district. Included were student disciplinary records, administrators' notes of private closed-door interviews with students and parents, grades, standardized test results, memos on student performance by teachers and coaches, comments on a student's financial condition, and letters from parents

intended for school administrators.

"Many of the records were subjective, highly sensitive, subject to misinterpretation, and reflected negatively on our children," said one parent who asked not to be identified. "These administrators repeatedly violated the trust we placed in them," he added.

Another parent of an affected student said, "When we brought our complaint to the administration officials, their lawyer actually told us, right to our faces, that they had released all these confidential records 'in the best interests' of our daughter. How insulting. We were absolutely furious."

In response to parental inquiries and concerns, Midland Public Schools officials claimed they had done nothing wrong in releasing these confidential records. When the district continued to release federally protected documents to the public, several students filed complaints with the U.S. Department of Education.

Although the district insisted it had not violated any federal privacy laws, the Department of Education found in September 1997 that the district had indeed violated federal law in each and every instance. However, FERPA lacked practical enforcement measures that would punish those who violated the privacy law.

When the district continued to release confidential records, the students turned to the American Civil Liberties Union for help. Three former students agreed to be representative plaintiffs in a federal civil rights lawsuit to force the Midland Public Schools to obey the law.

In February 1999, a settlement agreement was reached. Midland Public Schools, its Superintendent Arthur Frock (since retired), board member Richard Ohle and le-

gal counsel Douglass Witters apologized, admitting that each of them violated the privacy rights of students by divulging personal student and family records in violation of federal law.

As part of the settlement, the Midland Public Schools agreed to implement a stronger privacy policy, appoint an officer to monitor the district's compliance with the federal statute, and publish a notice to all current students telling them that the district had violated the law and explaining to students and parents their rights under federal law. The district also agreed to reimburse certain legal costs and not to retaliate against the students or their parents.

The district, however, refused to pledge to obey the law in the future. This prompted the students to engage Sen. Schuette in an effort to strengthen Michigan's privacy laws by amending the state's FOIA law. The result was the recently signed Senate Bill 588, which clarifies the responsibility of school officials to protect the privacy of student education records and eliminates any ambiguity between state and federal statutes.

Midland attorney Philip Van Dam, representing the three former students, commended the young adults for coming forward in defense of the privacy rights of all students.

"Organizations such as the Midland Public Schools hold tremendous power over students and their parents. For these young people to stand up for their rights in the face of tremendous individual, legal, and institutional power is remarkable and needs to be recognized," Van Dam said.

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act (Public Act 442 of 1976), or FOIA, states "it is the public policy of this state that all persons . . . are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and public employees The people shall be informed so that they may fully participate in the democratic process."

Consequently, any person has the right to inspect and/or receive copies of "public records" by filing a FOIA request letter.

A "public record" is very broadly defined as any writing (including pictures, recordings, electronic media and any other means of recording content) prepared, owned, used, or in the possession of an official government body in the performance of an official function.

While Michigan's FOIA does exempt a number of public records from disclosure, the courts continue to liberally construe the types of records available to the public. For example, in 1997 the Michigan Supreme Court held that a parent could obtain access to a public school teacher's personnel file, including written performance appraisals and disciplinary actions, when requested under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act.

For more information on Michigan's Freedom of Information Act, visit www.libofmich.lib.mi.us/law/publicacts/foia.html.

The Michigan Press Association has a FOIA request letter generator at www.michiganpress.org/usethisone/foigenerator.htm.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, or FERPA, is a federal law designed to protect the privacy of student education records. FERPA applies to any school receiving federal funding and covers both current and former students.

According to FERPA, an "education record" is almost any record kept by the school about a student or former student. This includes information in writing, print, e-mail, on video or audio tape, microfilm, or in any other form.

FERPA protects three fundamental rights of parents regarding their children's education records:

1. The right to have information contained in a child's education records kept confidential and disclosed only if parents consent in writing to its disclosure in advance.
2. The right to inspect and review a child's education records.
3. The right to seek amendment of records that parents believe to be inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of a child's privacy rights.

At age 18, these rights transfer to the student. Each year, every school must notify students of their rights under FERPA. If parents believe that their rights under FERPA have been violated, they may file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education and/or take legal action in the form of a federal civil rights lawsuit.

Details of FERPA may be found at www.ed.gov/offices/OM/fpco/index.html. A sample complaint letter if your child's school doesn't comply with FERPA can be found at <http://comnet.org/sac/ferpa.htm>.

STUDENT FOCUS

A successful education means “getting involved”

Recent grad says make the most of high school

“You can see the difference between just schooling and getting an education when you look at different teachers,” says Mike Wolf, a student recently graduated from public Greenville High School in western Michigan.

“Getting an education is . . . [when] teachers have you do experiments, go on field trips,” he explains. “Others talk at you with notes and lectures—you are just listening to someone yap—that’s schooling.”

The easygoing 18-year-old ought to know the difference: As a student, he had many teachers who encouraged him to explore areas that interested him.

“My advice to kids,” he says, “is to get involved. Join things that you are interested in. You gain friends and valuable experience. When you volunteer, you feel good knowing you are a part of something bigger than yourself. The more you get involved, the better time you’ll have in high school and the better you will be equipped for college and work.”

Mike’s many extracurricular activities included playing violin in orchestra, participating on the baseball and golf teams, editing the student newspaper, serving as student representative to the Greenville Board of Education, and acting as chair of public relations for the Youth Advisory Council, an arm of the privately funded philanthropic Greenville Area Foundation.

“Mike put himself in a position for leadership roles to gain more confidence,” says Deb Larsen, English and journalism instructor at Greenville High and Mike’s adviser. “He has learned how to work with people and to motivate them—a real sign of maturity. He sets an example.”

Mike’s drive to excel did not go unnoticed. During high school Honors Week, he received the Commander Grow Award, which is given to only one male student for outstanding moral character, responsibility, and integrity. Mike was also awarded several college scholarships, including one from Northwood University in Midland, where he has chosen to pursue a double major in business management and computer science.

How did Mike learn about computers? He says he just spent time at the computer figuring things out. When his family first got a modem for their computer, there were several small computer companies in town. He often would ask questions in their chat rooms and learn from their responses.

When Mike’s parents, Kathy and Dan Wolf, noticed how much he used the family computer, they provided him with his own system.

“He began programming at a young age,” Kathy says. “We encouraged him to join things like the Youth Advisory Council, but ever since I can remember, he has taken the reins of his own life.”

Mike’s new interest led to a job with Pathway Computing, a local computer service provider, as a support technician and Web designer. During the 1999-2000 school year, Mike also worked part-time as a computer technician and Web master at his school. That job became full-time over the summer.

“Adults come to Mike for technical help now,” Char Lothian, one of his former teachers, says. “He will have a positive influence on people wherever he goes because he comes to life with a positive attitude.”



“The more you get involved, the better time you’ll have in high school and the better you will be equipped for college and work,” says recent Greenville High School grad Mike Wolf.

Computers aren’t Mike’s only interest. A couple of years ago, he wanted to earn more money, so he decided to learn about the stock market by visiting Internet sites for investors. He asked general questions of experts in chat rooms. Then he read a book entitled *Greed Is Good*.

“The book taught me a lot about investing and about how the same principles apply to life—like taking risk in moderation,” he says.

Mike invested in a mutual fund and a couple of stocks, made money, and now is backing off, putting the money he earned toward college.

Larsen says she encourages her students to be accountable and self-motivated. With Mike she didn’t have to. “He is not afraid to get in and work hard. His family instilled that work ethic in him,” she says.

Mike’s mother Kathy emphasizes that prayer has played an important role in their support of their children. “I pray for my kids that they will turn out to be the people God wants them to be,” she says.

“I work hard,” Mike says. “But I want to be happy, too, and to make others happy in the process.”

And one thing that would make Mike happy is to someday own his own computer-related business. But how does he plan to succeed in such a competitive industry?

“I will see what niche needs to be filled when the time comes,” he says.

TEACHER FOCUS

The world is her classroom

Teacher of the year inspires, challenges students

It’s easy to become so focused on what needs changing in U.S. education that one misses the good news: that there are teachers out there who not only are good at what they do, but are themselves questioners and learners, excited about the world and excited to tell their students about it.

One of those teachers is Margaret Holtschlag, who has taught at public Murphy Elementary School in Haslett for 11 years and was named Teacher of the Year for the 1999-2000 school year by the Michigan Department of Education. Bestowed since 1980, the award for the first time carried extra prestige: As winner of the award, Holtschlag has been touring Michigan schools on paid leave as head of the department’s “education improvement team.”

“When parents learned that Margaret was to be named Teacher of the Year they were happy for her recognition, but were displeased she would not be teaching their children that year,” says Sherren Jones, Haslett assistant school superintendent.

As well they should have been. From teaching cleanliness by taking her students to the local Subway sandwich shop to teaching geology in gypsum mines near Grand Rapids to spending a week of school days at the state historical museum in Lansing, Holtschlag uses the real world as her classroom.

“A good teacher will find many good ways for her students to learn,” says Holtschlag, also a finalist for National Teacher of the Year 2000. The middle child of 12 siblings growing up on the south side of Chicago, she says, “I think I had always wanted to be a teacher, which started with doing stuff with my younger brothers and sisters.”

Several years ago, she took her pupils to the Michigan History Museum in Lansing, but it turned out to be a dissatisfying



Michigan Teacher of the Year for 1999-2000 Margaret Holtschlag poses in the Oval Office with U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley (left) and President Bill Clinton.

experience. “We had a limited amount of time, and we went through it as quickly as can be,” Holtschlag says. “I realized I was teaching them the wrong way.”

So she developed a program she calls, “One Big History Lesson,” in which pupils show up at the museum for five consecutive days and encounter creative lesson plans that combine artifacts, guest speakers, teachers and hands-on learning, all in a museum-rich classroom setting.

Holtschlag has expanded her museum program to include teachers and their third-

through fifth-grade classes from Haslett, Okemos, Lansing, Waverly, Laingsburg, Holt, and Charlotte school districts.

She recalls one boy’s experience learning about women’s suffrage, which was enacted with the adoption of the 19th Amendment in 1920. “He had found a 1920 voting ballot, and he wanted to donate it to the museum’s archives. It was a pretty exceptional document. He put it in a box and wrote a speech. And on the day his class went to the museum’s archives to learn about history and maps, he made his formal presen-

tation to the museum.”

Another teacher used the museum’s lumber gallery as a life-sized visual aid for geometry lessons. It captured the children’s imaginations and made it easier for them to learn geometry.

Another of Holtschlag’s passions is international cross-cultural education. While teaching at Haslett, she became one of the founding members of Linking All Types of Teachers to International Cross-cultural Education (LATTICE).

LATTICE is made up of educators from several school districts, along with international students and professors from Michigan State University. They meet monthly to discuss all kinds of issues. Jones says Holtschlag would frequently bring international students into her classroom.

Jones praised her star teacher for the unpaid time and energy she invested in planning a trip to South Korea for her pupils and for other class-related trips and projects. That’s just the kind of teacher she is, Tom Lepo, principal at Murphy Elementary School, says.

Holtschlag says the past year “has been a thriller. It still overwhelms me. This is one of the greatest professions.”

While Holtschlag isn’t sure what she will do when her term as Teacher of the Year ends this summer, the museum would like to keep the momentum of the “One Big History Lesson” going. “What I’m hoping is that I could be on loan to them,” she says.

The museum’s gain would be Murphy Elementary’s loss. “When you go to her class it’s a community,” Jones says. “It’s like when you’re invited to someone’s home. Her students will get up and greet you and make you feel welcome. There’s a waiting list to be in her class. She is really very, very special.”

Back to the future

College looks to the past to train tomorrow's teachers

For years, educators, reformers, and politicians have struggled to explain the decades-long decline in American K-12 student achievement test scores. From a lack of education funding to too-high student-teacher ratios to too much television watching, it seems there are almost as many explanations for poor student performance as there are students.

But one small college offers an explanation that is as surprisingly different as it is simple.

"Education is not and has never been a discipline," says Dr. Robert C. Hanna, an associate professor of education and director of teacher education at tiny Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Mich.

Following Hanna's philosophy, Hillsdale has designed a teachers' training program that focuses not on education as its own subject but on the different subjects that future educators should master before entering the classroom to teach.

According to Hanna, the time that achievement scores began to plummet—around the late 1950s and early 1960s—was about the same time many new educational theories like "whole language" reading and "new math" began to dominate the teachers' colleges and university departments of education that trained K-12 teachers.

Prior to these new theories, says Hanna, the prevailing opinion was that teaching was not a "discipline" like mathematics or English or biology. It was considered far more important for teachers to be expert in their subject areas than to learn about methods of teaching, which could be learned with the aid of a few classes and some on-the-job training.

"None of our students can major in education, and we do not have an edu-

cation degree," explains Hanna. "Rather, all students at Hillsdale College who seek Michigan's teaching certificate must have an academic major and an academic minor."

K-12 teachers in Michigan schools must be state-certified, which means they have followed a state-approved curriculum that normally includes many classes on teaching theories and methods. Hillsdale's program for earning the state teacher's certificate is somewhat different than that of the nearby state university.

Hillsdale's and the state university's "programs are accredited by the Michigan Department of Education and both result in the student's earning the identical initial teaching certificate," says Hanna. "But Hillsdale College requires only seven education courses plus a practicum and student teaching, with no education major. [The state university] offers an education major with over 100 courses spanning undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral studies."

Hanna believes that "students would be far better off learning at more advanced levels the content they will be teaching rather than taking 'make-work' education courses." Colleges and universities, he adds, could also "save substantial amounts of money through the elimination of the salaries of the professors who teach unnecessary education courses."

"Our staffing is already in place for the additional liberal arts courses our students must take in place of unnecessary education courses," he says.

Is Hillsdale's teacher preparation program successful? Hanna notes it has enjoyed a 100-percent placement rate for the past five years. He says Hillsdale gradu-



Director of Teacher Education Dr. Robert Hanna says Hillsdale College students who go on to teach spend less time on trendy education theories and more on mastering their respective subjects.

ates are in particular demand by schools whose administrators are dedicated to combating what they see as an "education crisis."

Hanna says that education students from Hillsdale graduate able to

- teach children how to read through explicit phonics instruction;
- analyze curricular materials for errors, omissions, biases, and subtle or overt undermining of parental authority and values;
- evaluate educational reform practices and proposals using rules of argumentation,

knowledge of fallacies, logic, statistics, and the scientific method; and

- focus serious effort upon rigorous academics, good character, good citizenship, and traditional Western values.

Hanna and the rest of the staff at Hillsdale College believe these traits are essential components of any plan to revive American education from its long decline. And while Hillsdale may be virtually alone in its diagnosis of the modern educational disease, it is confident that the future of teaching lies in the practices of the past.

"Politics" ousts superintendent in Eaton Rapids

Accountability measures called a "threat" to union

According to many school parents and community members, Dr. Buelah Mitchell was an effective and innovative superintendent in the Eaton Rapids School District for over three years. So why did the school board opt not to renew her contract?

"Politics and union power forced out an administrator who was making our schools better," says one Eaton Rapids parent who asked to not be identified.

Mitchell was hired in the fall of 1996. Eaton Rapids school board members were impressed by her resume, which showcased numerous positions in districts in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and many leadership awards for outstanding service and dedication to education.

But Mitchell had her work cut out for her. As incoming superintendent, she faced many challenges from the 3,300-student district located 30 miles south of Lansing. Teacher contracts needed to be renegotiated, state-mandated instructional hours were not being met, and test scores were low.

In the few years Mitchell served as superintendent, standardized test scores improved in nearly every grade, in every subject. Mitchell also oversaw the completion of a full-scale building expansion, which ended ahead of schedule and \$1 million under budget. She championed the district's technology program, making sure schools were wired for computer services, while instituting or expanding numerous additional programs for students, such as character education, foreign-exchange programs, and other plans to involve parents and community members in the schools.

However, in the process of making positive changes in the district, Mitchell implemented many measures that were opposed by the local affiliate of the Michigan Education Association (MEA) teachers' union.

One such measure was Mitchell's requirement that "skill-level assessment scores" in reading and math be included on all report cards. These scores cited the grade level at which the children were testing. Mitchell also attempted to include teachers' disciplinary records in their personnel files.

During her tenure, Mitchell faced three expired labor contracts that needed to be renegotiated with teachers, support staff, and



Test scores in every subject and grade level increased under Eaton Rapids School Superintendent Buelah Mitchell, who was ousted in 1998 by "union power," according to one parent.

transportation unions. The latter two contracts were renegotiated with complimentary remarks about the superintendent's ability to work cooperatively. However, the teachers' contract negotiations were not as amicable.

During contract negotiations, all participating parties were relying on information from school controller Jim Carl, whose figures indicated that the district was facing a budget deficit. Because of this understanding, the final contract agreed upon in August 1997 called for no retroactive pay increases for the 1996-97 school year and a 3-percent raise for the 1997-98 school year. Months later, an outside auditor revealed

that, in fact, the district was facing a \$354,000 budget surplus—contradicting Carl's earlier reports that first projected a budget deficit.

Also in 1997, when Mitchell recommended the board not renew the contracts of two administrators, the local MEA used her action to spread fear among school employees that their jobs may be next. The union then initiated a campaign against Mitchell, attempting to thwart her reforms

in negotiations for the next teachers' contract and influencing a majority of the school board against Mitchell.

An effort to recall two board members who were supportive of Mitchell began in 1997. According to the recall petition, board president Judy Sutton should be removed because she "voted to extend Mitchell's contract before it expired" and "failed to approve enough folding chairs to be brought into the board room for community members." With the support of the local union, both board members were removed in February 1998. One month later, the newly constituted board voted not to extend Mitchell's contract.

A new teachers' contract was then negotiated by the school board and MEA. The contract included numerous clauses to shield teachers from disciplinary actions and complaints filed against them by parents. It also recommended that parents give written notice 24 hours in advance before being allowed in their children's classrooms.

The 1999-2000 budget increased teachers' compensation significantly. This required the district to go to the taxpayers to ask for a 1-mill increase in local taxes, worth more than \$3.1 million over 10 years. However, the millage increase was voted down in 2000, forcing the district to make cuts elsewhere in its budget.

Today, Mitchell praises the positive changes that occurred while she was superintendent in Eaton Rapids and commends the teachers for their dedication to student achievement. Yet, she also admits that the union leadership was "much different" in Michigan than what she was used to in previous experiences.

Administrators still seek her out for counsel. "Not a week goes by when I don't get a note, a telephone call. I would say we forged something lasting and enduring. I wish the very best for the community," Mitchell says from her new perch as superintendent of Highland Park schools.

One former board member, who asked to remain anonymous, says Mitchell "was making people do their jobs and holding them accountable, which probably posed a threat."

To the Eaton Rapids parent who requested anonymity, Mitchell's dismissal and the installation of a new superintendent in May of this year is not encouraging. "Unfortunately," says the parent, "school politics will maintain the status quo in Eaton Rapids, which does not serve students or the community."

The Biggest Consumer Fraud In America

NEARLY 60 PERCENT of today's high school graduates enter college—an impressive number considering the fact that tuition rates have grown nearly three times as fast as inflation and twice as fast as the economy. A college education is, it seems, no longer a four-year expense; it is a lifetime mortgage.

What kind of return do students receive for their investment? According to national surveys, tens of thousands of college seniors do not know when Columbus sailed to the New World, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, or why the Civil War was fought. In one recent test, half of the graduates could not even interpret a simple bus schedule. No wonder higher education has been called "the biggest consumer fraud in America."

On many campuses, students pay as much as \$20,000 a year for the privilege of being crammed into classrooms of 500 or 1,000. Seldom do they come into contact with professors—most of their courses are taught by other students who are called "teaching assistants." And so few sections of required courses are offered that it takes them five to six years to complete their degrees.

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."

But Hillsdale College refuses federal funds and federal control. The bottom line is success, not subsidies. Students are offered an outstanding four-year liberal arts education and intensive contact with talented professors who really care about them. The College's educational mission also extends far beyond campus to reach more than 750,000 subscribers through *Imprimis*. This free publication features some of the most important scholars and leaders of the day on timely issues of national interest.



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COMMENTARY

Increase teachers' pay the right way



Matthew J. Brouillette

Former teacher
Matthew Brouillette is director of education policy with the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, Michigan.

Few people will disagree that the best school teachers are often paid less than they deserve. But even fewer people agree when it comes to figuring out what to do about the situation.

Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers union, suggests simply that salaries for all teachers be raised legislatively to the same level as doctors, lawyers, and engineers. "Low salaries prevent quality people from both entering and staying in the profession," she argues. Feldman further notes that new college graduates, as well as veteran teachers, are being lured to other professions with lucrative salary offers while the teaching profession languishes.

She's right. But is the answer to attracting and retaining high-quality teachers as simple as increasing salaries? The problem with solutions like Feldman's is that they would require crippling infusions of taxpayer dollars, to the tune of more than \$2 billion per year in Michigan alone.

There is a better way for teachers to make the kind of money they are worth and even to make teaching, as a profession, attractive enough for top young college graduates to gravitate toward it again. But it will require a complete re-orientation of the profession.

Teaching—unlike other white-collar occupations—is one of the few professions where salaries have little or nothing to do with competency, demand, or performance. Public school teachers are paid according to a union-negotiated, one-size-fits-all, seniority-based salary schedule. This means that high-performing teachers are paid the same as mediocre or incompetent teachers.

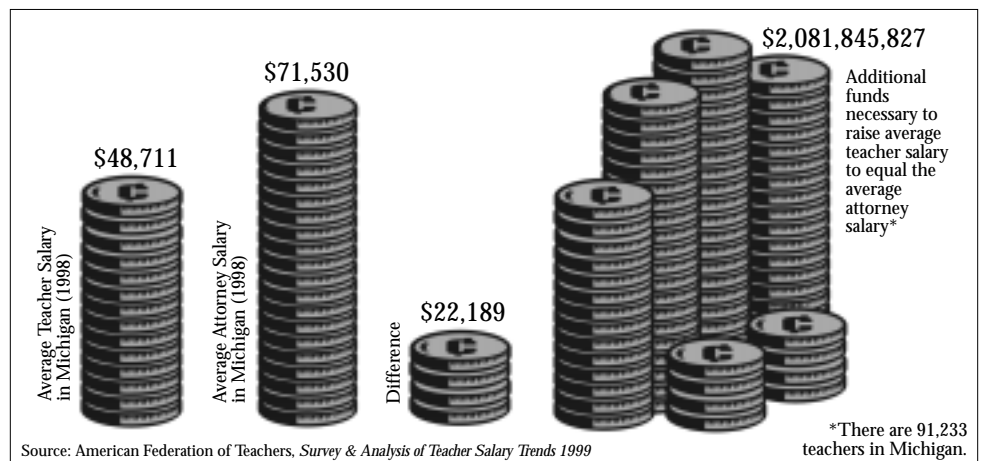
Pay will become equitable for educators only when the teaching profession becomes competitive like other careers. But first, enterprising educators must be given opportunities to teach beyond the traditional school setting. In short, they must have choices.

Doctors, lawyers, and engineers can practice their profession in variety of ways. They can be employed by organizations, they can partner with others, or they can work for themselves in private practice. School teachers lack such essential professional choices.

Traditionally, teachers must enter their profession as employees of schools or school districts. Many qualified teachers leave the profession in order to pursue more autonomous or financially rewarding careers. Other potential teachers never consider entering the profession due to the lack of opportunities for professional development and advancement.

The teaching profession must allow educators the flexibility to work for themselves or the freedom to collaborate with others. They must be able to negotiate their own salaries and establish their own value in the education marketplace.

What if teachers were allowed more professional choices? What would this new



education economy look like?

First of all, freeing teachers from seniority-based pay scales would force schools to directly compete with each other to attract and retain good teachers. Administrators would need to provide appropriate financial rewards to teachers who excel or risk losing them to a competing school. Mediocre or incompetent teachers would be forced to improve their skills or choose another line of work. These changes would bring the teaching profession into line with other professional occupations.

Educators with excellent skills also would recognize that, due to their market value outside the traditional school setting, they may be better off going into private practice on their own or partnering with like-minded educators, and contracting their services to the highest bidder.

Public school districts have long benefited from contracting out for services like transportation, food services, and building maintenance. Why not contract for instruc-

tional services in a similar way? Such opportunities for teachers could create a new breed of "educator-entrepreneur." This is already happening to some extent in private and charter schools, but the current system by and large smothers or prevents these opportunities from flourishing.

If the best teachers are to earn a salary that more justly reflects their talents and abilities, instead of being paid the same as poorly performing teachers, then the same incentives that drive continuous improvement and innovation among doctors, lawyers, and engineers must be brought to bear on the teaching profession.

There is no question that increasing teachers' salaries is key to attracting and retaining more high-quality educators in our schools. But greater freedom and professional choice for teachers, not expensive tax hikes on citizens, is the best way to accomplish that goal.

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Education

continued from page 4

Florida rates its schools, from A (excellent) to F (poor), based on standardized test scores. To qualify for the voucher program a school district must be deemed failing, or receive an "F" grade. The 78 schools that were graded "F" last year all improved to such a degree on this year's tests that there are now only four schools with an "F" grade in all of Florida. Thus, the voucher program would only apply to this year's students in those few failing schools.

Some national education experts question such dramatic improvements, and wonder whether students were given easier tests and "coached" by teachers on how to better answer the questions, rather than truly

learning more than in previous years. Florida public education authorities and teachers respond by saying they have worked hard to prepare students for this year's tests, and that this is why students have made marked improvement. Teachers have been cited in Florida newspapers as "dancing down the halls" and celebrating over the striking improvements in test scores.

Bill Neumann, an education consultant, told *The Miami Herald*, "I have to wonder why those Florida school officials are breaking out the champagne. Is it because they can hold onto their budgets, or because students now make the grade?"

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COMMENTARY

Home sweet school



Anna Stephens

Anna Stephens is a 16-year-old home-schooled student who lives in Midland, Michigan.

Many people were surprised when home-schooled children took first, second, and third place recently in the national spelling bee. If you were one of those people, perhaps you—like many Americans—have a mental picture of home-schooled students as kids who sit around the house being taught academics by a mom who doesn't know a whole heck of a lot and is mostly busy with housework anyway.

But as a 16-year-old who has been home schooled since the first grade, I would like to describe for you my typical day and show how utterly different my home-schooling experience has been from that unfair and negative stereotype.

A day in the life

A home-schooled student's days are never dull. After getting up around 6:30 a.m., my 13-year-old sister Rebecca practices the piano until breakfast at 7:15. Meanwhile, I get up, and after breakfast, I also practice the piano. Mom and Rebecca get started on the day's lessons and I join them after about a half-hour.

At 9:15, we drive Rebecca to band class at the public middle school, and Mom and I go for a walk at the local Chippewa Nature Center. After an hour, we pick Rebecca up from band, go home, and have lunch.

After lunch, I finish practicing the piano and get the rest of my schoolwork done. My course load this last year was algebra II, biology, Spanish II, English, world literature, and American history.

Around 2 p.m. I leave home for different activities. Mondays I have high school co-op with a group of other home schoolers. In the co-op, several parents volunteer to teach a class such as algebra, literature, history, or grammar for other parents' children.

Tuesdays I volunteer at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, where I help with what needs to be done in a professional office environment. Wednesdays I catch up with school, visit friends, and go to concerts and plays. Thursdays I have piano lessons and tutor at a local elementary school, and Fridays I usually have a once-a-month activity such as the home-school service club.

After dinner, I get my homework done and then enjoy free time.

Educational advantages

There are many advantages to this way of learning—advantages that a more traditional school simply cannot offer due to structural restraints. One of the greatest of these advantages is being able to vary the pace of study according to my needs. In a traditional school, a median pace must be maintained: The faster students must wait for slower ones, and the slower students must stumblingly endeavor to catch up. In a home school, I can spend more time in a difficult subject and move quickly through the easy subjects.

An individually tailored curriculum is another advantage of home schooling. Each student's learning style can be taken into account in the presentation of material. Visual learners can use more textbooks, auditory learners can be read to and listen to lectures on tape, and kinesthetic learners (learners who respond to touch, smell, and taste) can do many hands-on activities. At the same time, however, home-schooling parents can ensure that their children learn to use the other methods as well, so that the visual learner can use lectures, the auditory learner can get information from textbooks, and the kinesthetic learner can do both.

Home schooling is also more easily adaptable to children with learning disabilities. Parents are often the most concerned for their child's progress, and they are the ones most familiar with their child's problems. Thus, home-schooling parents of a developmentally slow child are often best able to accurately judge how quickly their child is capable of learning a particular lesson and proceed accordingly.

High society

The most commonly heard criticism of home schooling is that home-schooled children don't receive sufficient "socialization." Contrary to this myth, home-schooling parents don't lock their children in dungeons or chain them to desks. In fact, home-schooling parents usually go the extra mile to assure that their children get maximum exposure to other children in their neighborhoods and surrounding communities, attending events and participating in activities sponsored by local private and public schools. At the same time, home-schooling parents are better able to protect their children from negative experiences, such as violence, until their children are ready to handle such experiences with understanding and compassion.

Home-schooled students also often find more opportunities to interact with people outside their age groups and social niches. We don't spend nearly all our time with people of the same age, so we gain a broader perspective beyond the stereotypical labels in traditional schools, such as "preppies," "jocks," "nerds," and so forth.

Increasingly popular

If the stereotypes about home schooling were actually true, the movement wouldn't have been gaining momentum for decades. Thousands of families across America are proving that home education is a viable op-

tion for those concerned about the lack of quality in the public school system. Home schooling parents, using the vast teaching-aid and curricular resources now available, can equip themselves to fully meet the academic and social needs of their children and, in many cases, can exceed in quality what more traditional education can provide.

Home schooling is not for everyone. But parents across the nation are beginning to remember that they are the ones primarily responsible for their children's education, and many are taking matters into their own hands. As they do, laws are becoming much more home-schooler-friendly, and home schooling is increasingly becoming an appealing option for parents who want to be more involved in their children's journey into responsible adulthood and maturity.

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COMMENTARY

European observations on U.S. public education



Dirk C. van Raemdonck
Dr. van Raemdonck was educated in Belgium before holding faculty positions at several U.S. institutions of higher education.

Many Europeans greatly admire the vitality, creativity, and optimism that characterize America's competitive, free-market economy. Indeed, the benefits of choice and competition form the basis for the American success story.

That is why when I came to the United States from Belgium in 1980, I was surprised to discover the virtual absence of choice and competition in this country's primary and secondary education system. After all, even many European governments—despite their reputations for favoring large public sectors—still encourage an open educational market, where students have the choice and the ability, regardless of income, to attend public or private K-12 schools nationwide.

In countries such as Belgium and France, annual government grants cover the operating costs of schools: salaries (except for religion teachers), books, heating, and the like. The capital investment in buildings and facilities are borne entirely by a school's organizing body, whether it is a local public education authority, a private foundation, or religious institution. The annual grant for each school depends on the number of students enrolled. If a student leaves a certain school for another, the money follows the student. To deal with church and state issues, tax monies are allocated without regard to any religious affiliation of a recipient school. True, all private and public primary and secondary schools must observe a minimum curriculum required for accreditation, but this curriculum includes the option for a course on religion.

A system where the funding follows the student and where it is possible to attend any school of choice (regardless of family income) forces public and private schools to compete for students among themselves and with each other. If parent and student decide that the present school does not deliver, they are able to seek a better school elsewhere. If enough students leave, the school faces bankruptcy and liquidation. This provides a powerful incentive for administrators and teachers to keep a lean operation and continually improve on the service they deliver.

By contrast, public education in the United States operates in a manner reminiscent of medieval feudalism. Students seem like indentured peasants, tied to the local manor (the school district) and unable to work (study) anywhere else than on the land of the manor. No outsiders are allowed access to the manor. Money and wealth remain with the manor. Only those who possess independent wealth have the freedom of choice to go elsewhere and find the best education available. This country, famous for its commitment to freedom and equal opportunity, allows near-monopolies in education that deliver a poor product, offer indifferent service, and resist innovation.

The vast size of administrative and support staff in U.S. schools also is baffling. At my rather typical high school in Belgium, the student body of some 600 was and still is served by one principal, three administrators (who also functioned as substitute teachers) and two maintenance men. Counseling work was contracted out. Meantime, Michigan's non-teachers average 63 per one thousand students, as opposed to perhaps 12 per thousand at schools in Belgium.

The United States spends almost seven percent of its national income on education, more than any other developed country except Canada and Denmark. Why then do American students cut such a poor profile in

the international comparisons of basic and advanced skills? American 12th-graders rank behind 95 percent of the children of other, similar countries. These other nations that spend less are getting better results with fewer people. Clearly, then, the real issue is not that Americans spend too little on education.

So what is the answer? Our higher education system is characterized by vigorous competition among public and private institutions. That pursuit of excellence in order to be the school of choice has made

American higher education the envy of the world. If a competitive education market is good for our colleges and universities, then how can it not be equally good for our primary and secondary schools?

Parents and students alike know that the public school system is not delivering the results needed to create the educated workforce for an advanced, global economy. The solution is to end the monopoly and introduce real choice and competition into education. What are we waiting for?

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Diverse Viewpoints

Are private schools accountable to the public?

Private schools lack public accountability

"Right now, a private school is free to tell you anything they want, or nothing."
*Alex Molnar, Professor of Education,
 University of Wisconsin*

Most private schools are not publicly accountable. It's a key difference between public and private education and it needs examination.

Public accountability is rooted in the notion that there are essential activities, services, and public policies that serve the commonweal. These activities, services, and public policies are so important to the well-being of the larger society that they must be open to the full view of all.

In the area of community health, for example, it's easy to see the importance of public accountability. We cannot have individuals or groups determining for themselves whether or not to use or dispose of toxic substances because those decisions affect us all. We choose, therefore, to surrender some measure of unfettered individual freedom in accepting public accountability and conformance to external standards developed to protect the common good. But any oversight is accomplished in the bright light of public accountability, where we all see how our public policies are being implemented and where we all can make judgments about the appropriateness of the actions of those who act on our behalf.

Clearly, the concept of public accountability has the potential to conflict with individual freedom. For example, another community health issue is smoking, and we have struggled as a society with the degree of oversight that is appropriate. Does an individual have a natural right to risk his or her own health by engaging in a risky activity? What if the public must pay for the consequences of those individual decisions through increased health care costs? What about those, such as children in the home of a smoker, who suffer the secondhand consequences of the adult's decision because they cannot make another decision? Is this justification for laws against smoking in certain areas or tax policy designed to curtail smoking?

What then of education? Our social and political values hold that an educated populace is essential to maintenance of our democratic society and a strong economy. Our deepest traditions support the ideal of each individual able to participate and decide public policy issues, and contribute to our economic well-being, using the foundation provided by education.

Such beliefs, then, call for a public discussion of the fine balance between our acknowledgement of parental responsibility for the education of children and parents'



consequent right to choose (and pay for) a private education according to their convictions and values as well as the larger society's interest in well-educated citizens. We come then to the question of whether or not private schools are sufficiently accountable to the public.

The answer is often "yes." As Professor Alex Molnar of the University of Wisconsin notes, private schools may choose to fully share information with the public and many do. But many do not, reasoning that they have no obligation larger than serving their own constituency of parents or sponsors. Despite the compelling interest of a democratic society in measuring the quality of their efforts, some private schools respond that they only need to be accountable to the adults who send their children to them.

In our state, private schools may decline to have their students take state tests or report the results of those tests, do not need to conform to minimum days and hours of student instruction, may refuse to conduct governance meetings openly, may exempt themselves from teacher certification and teacher testing requirements, may decline to publicly report financial information and may ignore public requests for information. These rules and requirements that private schools may evade are the standards that society has concluded serve the commonweal—standards with which all public schools must now comply.

No one has an objection to private education, which has a long and solid record of accomplishment, and those private schools that are fully accountable on a voluntary basis are to be commended. The policy question, however, is whether or not the public should know whether or not all private schools are meeting minimal standards of public accountability. They certainly should.

Michael Emlaw is associate executive director of the Michigan Association of School Administrators. He served as a school superintendent for a combined 30 years in three different Michigan school districts.



Michael Emlaw

NO



George Locke, Ph.D.

YES

Private schools are accountable by definition

One of the more amazing criticisms ever leveled at private schools is that they are not accountable to the public.

Why is this criticism amazing?

Because of the fundamental difference between public and private schools. Funding for public schools comes through the involuntary method of taxation, which means the money keeps on coming regardless of whether or not people are satisfied with the schools' performance. By contrast, privately (read: voluntarily) funded schools can go out of business if they fail to satisfy their customers. It is in this way that private schools can be said to be accountable by definition.

Furthermore, public schools' reliance on coercive funding sources means that they suffer from a lack of accountability themselves. This reliance is why we need volumes of laws to monitor and regulate the schools' activities. But even with all these laws, public schools can never be as accountable as private schools are for the simple reason that regulation cannot substitute for the kind of consumer accountability private schools exhibit.

But consumer accountability isn't the only way private schools are held accountable. For example, Missouri Synod Lutheran Schools, which educate over 24,000 Michigan students, are first and foremost accountable to God. As superintendent of these schools, I would remind those who believe this makes no serious practical difference of the fact that we operate eight schools in the city of Detroit. These are attended by 100 percent non-Lutheran children. In the remainder of our schools, the non-Lutheran figure varies between 10 and 50 percent. Apparently there are many people out there who are willing to make sacrifices so that their children can take advantage of the practical difference religious accountability makes in our schools' atmosphere, curriculum, and orientation. If this were not so, we wouldn't be in business.

Another way religious accountability manifests itself in Lutheran schools is in the degree to which the authority and responsibility of parents is respected. God's Word teaches that Christian training is first and foremost a parental responsibility, and Lutheran schools exist to help parents fulfill this responsibility. All teachers at Lutheran schools therefore are required to form educational partnerships with parents. The more parents are involved in these partnerships, the greater the impact of Christian education.

Lutheran schools—and other private schools—also are held accountable to the state through a surprising number of government laws and regulations. For example, all private schools in Michigan have been subject to the Private, Denominational and Parochial Schools Act since 1921. This act specifically gives Michigan's Superintendent of Public Instruction the authority to examine the sanitary conditions, pupil enrollments, courses of study, and qualifications of teachers.

Another law mandates that all teachers must be graduates of certified teacher-training institutions and possess a valid teaching certificate. About 80 percent of all Lutheran teachers are trained in our 10 teacher colleges throughout the United States. The other 20 percent are dedicated Lutherans who are graduates of secular institutions such as Michigan State. Our office tracks the certification of approximately 1,000 Lutheran teachers. We keep a current copy of each certificate in the teacher's personnel folder. All of our first-year teachers also take a teacher competency

test required by the state. The Michigan Department of Education requires all schools to report enrollment, faculty number, and teacher certification every September. Non-compliance can lead to a school being deleted from the list of "approved" private schools and possibly closed down.

Other state laws require that every school conduct a minimum of eight fire drills and two tornado drills per year. Schools are required to keep a log of the dates of the drills and the evacuation times are recorded and kept on file. Our buildings are periodically visited by the State Fire Marshall's office, the Department of Health, and the State Boiler Inspector.

Furthermore, children must present a certificate proving they have been immunized before they may attend our schools. Principals are required by law to report to the local health department on the status of immunization at the time of school entry and for new kindergarten/first grade students.

Lutheran schools also comply with the number of school days per year required by the state: 180 days with 1,098 instructional hours. A number of our schools currently exceed these minimum requirements.

New construction of Lutheran schools and remodeling of existing schools must comply with the State Construction Code regarding "barrier-free access" for physically limited persons. We are fully affected by and comply with all provisions of the Americans With Disabilities Act. We also must comply with federal laws regarding the abatement of cancer-causing asbestos.

We also comply with regulations regarding the medical handling of blood borne pathogens, safe drinking water, environmental tobacco smoke, indoor air-quality management, pesticide management, the presence of radon, sexual harassment, and poster notification.

Finally, a 1996 law requires that all teachers and support staff that come in contact with children be subject to a State Police and FBI background check.

In short, "lack of accountability" may be a problem in Michigan public schools, but it is not so among private schools. We are accountable by our nature as voluntarily funded institutions. We are accountable according to our religious beliefs. And we are accountable to the state through a vast array of laws and regulations as well.

Amazing, right?

George Locke, Ph.D., currently serves as superintendent of the Michigan District-Missouri Synod Lutheran schools, which number 160 preschools, 95 elementary schools, and 7 high schools with a combined enrollment of over 24,000 students.

Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of *Michigan Education Report*. Tell us what you think: "Are private schools accountable to the public?" Send your comments to

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