

## SHORT SUBJECTS

**School vouchers would be available** for parents of students in seven Michigan school districts, including Detroit's 170,000 public school students, under a fall ballot proposal, according to a state high school dropout report released in September. See related stories, right and page 5.

**Private schools returned money to the state** last year when half of the schools participating in Milwaukee's voucher program didn't need to use all of the \$4,894 they were given to educate students in the program. Meanwhile, the American Enterprise Institute reports that Milwaukee public school officials are preparing to approve a 2000-01 education budget that provides \$9,500 per student to the city's public schools.

**Detroit public schools CEO Kenneth Burnley** is considering hiring a company to run as many as 45 of the city's worst schools, according to the *Detroit Free Press*. The leading contender is Edison Schools, a company that manages 108 schools across the country, including 19 in Michigan. The nearby suburb of Inkster recently contracted with Edison to manage all of its schools.

**Michigan ranks 11th nationwide in "education freedom,"** according to a new report from the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. The "Education Freedom Index" gives top marks to states offering parents greater educational choices. It found that more choices among public, charter, private, and home schools equals better academic achievement outcomes for all students in a state. Arizona topped the list, while Georgia came in last. The report can be viewed at [www.manhattaninstitute.org/html/cr\\_14.htm](http://www.manhattaninstitute.org/html/cr_14.htm).

**A Florida District Court of Appeals recently upheld that state's school voucher law** as constitutional. The three-judge panel overturned on Oct. 3 an earlier ruling by a Tallahassee trial judge that said the law violated the state constitution by allowing tax dollars to be spent on private schools. The decision remanded the case to the trial court to address other claims raised by the school employee unions.

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# Vote approaches in education reform battle

## Proposal 1: Vouchers, teacher testing, funding guarantee

The issue of school vouchers will take political center stage Nov. 7, 2000, as Michigan voters go to the polls to decide if a measure known as Proposal 1 should be adopted to amend the state constitution.

The proposal, if approved, would overturn the constitutional ban on K-12 vouchers, tax credits, and other forms of indirect aid to families wishing to choose nonpublic education for their children.

The state would be required to provide tax-funded vouchers for nonpublic school tuition, worth half of the per-pupil expenditure on public schools, for students in districts with graduation rates less than two-thirds. Seven of Michigan's 555 school districts, including Detroit, automatically would be affected the first year. Other districts could decide by school board action or a vote of local residents if they wished to

adopt vouchers.

Proposal 1 also would constitutionally guarantee that the level of per-pupil funding for public schools never drops below fiscal year 2000-2001's record-high levels, and would require teachers in public schools and nonpublic schools that accept vouchers to be tested in academic subjects.

"Every child deserves a chance to learn,"

PROPOSAL 1 continued on page 2



On November 7th, voters could make Michigan the second state to adopt a statewide voucher program for children in failing school districts. The amendment to the Michigan Constitution would also establish regular testing of teachers in academic subjects and increase the guaranteed per-pupil funding in public schools.

# Study: Over \$600 million per year for remedial ed

## Communities weigh in on unprepared students at public forums across Michigan

Michigan businesses and institutions of higher learning are paying an estimated \$601 million per year due to the lack of basic reading, writing, and math skills among students and employees, according to a study released in September by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

"We're not talking about higher-level skills. We're talking about reading, basic grammar, and simple arithmetic—skills every citizen must possess in order to survive in an increasingly complex world," says study author Dr. Jay P. Greene.

Greene is a senior fellow with the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and a research associate with the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance.

The study, *The Cost of Remedial Education: How Much Michigan Pays When Students Fail to Learn Basic Skills*, reached its astonishing estimate of remedial education's costs by employing five separate strategies and taking an average of the five figures.

REMEDIAL continued on page 8

# Bush, Gore see larger education role for feds

## Disagree mostly over school choice

Education reform has emerged as one of the leading issues of the 2000 presidential campaign. Opinion polls consistently show large numbers of parents concerned about the state of public schools, and major party candidates George Bush and Al Gore are tailoring their messages to appeal to this concern.

Although the federal government accounts for only about 7 percent of education expenditures in the country, federal education dollars often return to state and local governments with a bewildering array of restrictions and requirements attached.

Accordingly, federal education policy can have a great impact on Michigan teachers, schools, and students. *Michigan Education Report* therefore has compiled for its readers a summary of the two major party candidates' positions on various education issues, culled from Web sites and public pronouncements.

### Federal role in education

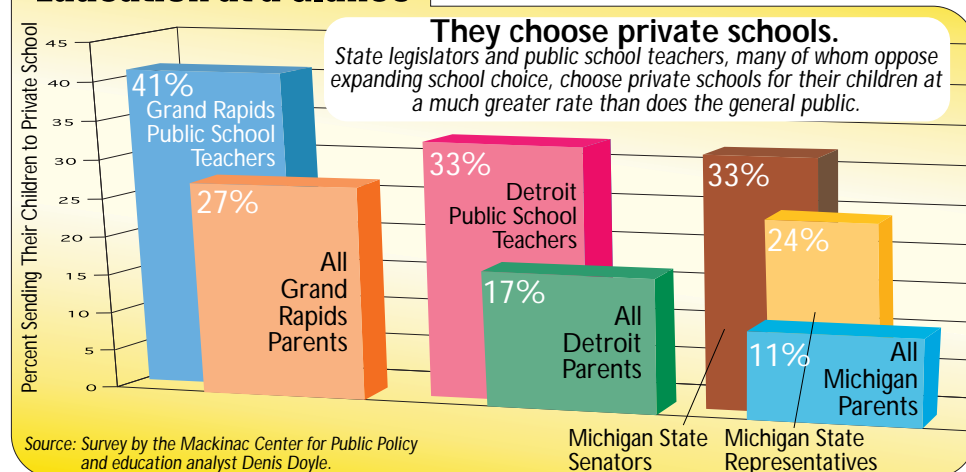
Both candidates support a strong federal role in education, but disagree on the degree to which that role should be expanded.

Bush proposes to consolidate over 60

federal programs into five categories including disadvantaged children, bilingual education, teacher quality, character education, and school choice. He favors moving the "Head Start" program from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Education and the creation of several new large federal programs. States may opt out of federal regulations if they

BUSH, GORE continued on page 11

### Education at a Glance





# Proposal 1

continued from page 1

according to the Web site of Kids First! Yes!, the group promoting Proposal 1. "But too many children in Michigan are being denied that chance. They're trapped in schools that don't work."

Kids First! Yes! says its proposal would improve education in many ways, and that periodically testing teachers for competency is an important, and often overlooked, means of achieving better schools.

"Most everyone agrees that whether or not children succeed in school depends on the knowledge, skill, and commitment of their teachers," says the Kids First! Yes! Web site. "With so much riding on the quality of teachers, the public needs assurance that every student is taught by teachers who know a lot about the subjects they teach."

According to current law, new teachers who were state certified after 1992 are presently required to pass a test, but the vast majority of teachers in the state have not been tested.

"Opponents of education reform have tried very hard to divert attention from teacher testing, but the overwhelming majority of Michigan parents and taxpayers support this common-sense reform," says Kids First! Yes! Co-Chairman Dick DeVos. "Teacher testing is an idea whose time has come."

But the political battle over the proposal has indeed focused on its most controversial aspect, vouchers. "Vouchers have been cleverly packaged as a plan to help the poorest kids from the poorest, most troubled school districts," according to ALL Kids First!, an anti-voucher coalition of public school groups and unions including the Michigan Education Association. "But it is precisely these kids who will be hurt most by a weakened and abandoned public school system."

Fear of an "abandoned" public education system is no reason to vote no on the proposal, say supporters. "The Kids First! Yes! funding guarantee will protect school districts against a cut in their per-child funding due to a recession or a change in funding priorities by politicians," says the Kids First! Yes! Web site.

Proposal 1 supporters add that public schools will not be harmed, pointing to the fact that the vouchers are worth only half of

the approximately \$6,600 schools receive in per-pupil funding. Each student who is switched from a public to a private school would save the school aid fund \$3,300.

According to Michigan Department of Education data, nearly 180,000 students live in the districts that are immediately eligible for a voucher plan under the proposal. This includes over 170,000 students in Detroit and nearly 6,500 in the Buena Vista (Saginaw), Coleman Community, Holton, Inkster City, Mackinaw City, and Vanderbilt

The Department of Education data also list 188 school districts with graduation rates above 90 percent, including 15 that graduated 100 percent of their students. (See page 5 for a related story and charts on statewide graduation and dropout rates.)

While acknowledging that "Michigan has some great schools," Kids First! Yes! notes that citizens nevertheless should be concerned if there are any children not being served by their schools.

"Supporters of Proposal 1 believe ev-

view is not shared by the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in June that Louisiana's use of public funds to purchase computers and other instructional materials for parochial schools was a constitutional form of indirect aid.

Vouchers, argue Kids First! Yes! spokesmen, are similar to the Louisiana ruling. "Vouchers provided under the Kids First! Yes! education reform proposal are defined as only indirect—and not direct—aid to nonpublic schools, clearly passing this latest constitutional test," according to the group's Web site.

"Opponents of education reform lost a major battle," Kids First! Yes! Co-Chairman DeVos said of the ruling. "Those who want to vote 'no' on equal educational opportunity will not be able to stop education reform in the courts."

The proposal's opponents agree reform is necessary, but say that vouchers are not the answer. "There is no quick fix or simple solution to some of the problems that some schools face," says ALL Kids First!'s Beardmore. "Vouchers do absolutely nothing to address the issues that are vital to continually improve our schools to meet the needs of all children."

"Voucher supporters continue to talk about teacher testing, funding, and a lot of other things which are simply not detailed in this deceptive proposal," adds Georgene Campbell, chair of ALL Kids First! and former president of the Michigan PTA. The bottom line, she says, is that "Proposal 1 takes money away from children in our local neighborhood schools and gives it to private and for-profit schools."

ALL Kids First! recommends that reformers focus on "lowering class size, improving staff development, increasing parental involvement, investing in technology and improving the physical structure of our schools."

For more information on Proposal 1, visit the Kids First! Yes! Web site at [www.kidsfirstyes.org](http://www.kidsfirstyes.org) and the ALL Kids First! Web site at [www.allkidsfirst.org](http://www.allkidsfirst.org). Also, visit the Citizens Research Council of Michigan at [www.crcmich.org](http://www.crcmich.org) for a complete analysis of Proposal 1.

ery child in Michigan deserves a quality education today," says Robert Coverson, a Kids First! Yes! spokesman and pastor of Detroit's Second Chapel Hill Baptist Church. "No parents should ever be forced to send their child to a failing school."

Another contentious issue has been the question over whether or not vouchers run afoul of "separation of church and state" jurisprudence.

"Since 85 percent of the private schools in our state are run by religious institutions, it is inevitable that public tax dollars will be used for religious education if this proposal passes," according to the ALL Kids First! Web site. "This violates the U.S. Constitution and the principle of separation of church and state. Allowing indirect funding by passing money through the hands of parents may be less obvious, but it still violates the constitution."

Proponents of Proposal 1 argue that this

## 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

Area school districts. Of these districts, Inkster has the worst graduation rate: 21 percent. The state average is 81 percent.

Another 120,000 students live in 30 districts that are just above the two-thirds graduation rate cutoff for vouchers.

"These kids are being left behind and are being robbed of the American dream," says Kids First! Yes! Co-Chairman Eddie Edwards of Detroit's Joy of Jesus Ministries.

Voucher opponents view the Department of Education data differently. "Let's remember that this list proves almost all public school districts in Michigan are successful and doing a good job educating our children," says Dorothy Beardmore, president of the state Board of Education and honorary co-chair of ALL Kids First! "With all the talk about failing schools, the fact is that our schools are not failing. Our schools have shown a steady improvement over the past 10 years."

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# Teacher shortage forces states to relax rules for educators

## Alternative certification opens classrooms to other qualified instructors

Many education reformers have long warned that state teacher certification requirements, instead of ensuring teacher quality, were so rigid and bureaucratic that they actually were keeping the best and the brightest instructors out of America's classrooms.

Now, a severe, nationwide teacher shortage means schools are scrambling to modify those teaching requirements—and not necessarily to find better teachers, but just to find teachers.

The U.S. Department of Education says America will need more than a million new teachers by 2010, or almost half the number of teachers currently in America's elementary and secondary schools. And that's teachers who stay and don't leave for other, more rewarding jobs: 20 percent of all new teachers leave the profession within three years. An entire generation of veterans, now in their late 40s and 50s, is expected to retire in the next decade. And the demand for smaller classes means more teachers will be needed per school.

To help solve this problem, many states are adopting alternative teacher certification requirements, to remove what reform experts have long regarded as a "bottleneck" in the acquisition of new teachers. According to *School Reform News*, in the past two years, 14 states have passed, introduced, or plan to introduce new legislation to establish alternative programs to prepare and certify individuals who already have a bachelor's degree and want to become teachers. Those states are Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The National Center for Education Information (NCEI) says that in 1998, more

than 24,000 new teachers were certified through alternative programs. The total number of teachers certified through these programs now totals over 125,000.

"What we are seeing are market forces

least a bachelor's degree, so the old model of training teachers in undergraduate education programs does not work. States are aggressively meeting the challenge by creating new training and licensing avenues for

hand experience what they need to know to be successful after leaving school. Other groups strongly represented among alternatively certified teachers are former K-12 teachers who have upgraded their credentials to get back into teaching, and others previously trained as teachers, but who took other jobs instead. Some are even coming into the K-12 system from backgrounds in higher education.

Another twist to the population of alternatively certified teachers is their diversity. "There is a rather stark and troubling mismatch between the diversity of the student population and the relative homogeneity [white, female] of the current teaching force," Brenda Welburn, executive director of the National Association of State Boards of Education, recently told *School Reform News*. She says alternative certification is bringing in teachers who are more likely to be older, to be men, and to be people of color.

New Jersey has more than 15 years' experience with its alternative plan. After a state commission report revealed that the states' teacher preparation programs were producing poorly educated teachers, the state came up with a plan that produced teacher applicants boasting higher scores on teacher licensing tests than traditionally prepared teachers, with lower attrition rates.

Perhaps best of all, alternative certification is bringing in individuals who are more likely to accept positions where demand for qualified teachers is greatest: in inner cities, in rural areas, and in subject areas such as math and science.

### Michigan Lags Other States on Alternative Teacher Certification Department of Education Working to Deal with Dearth of Educators

With more than half of the states implementing alternative teacher certification programs to deal with a looming nationwide teacher shortage, Michigan is still trying to come up with a plan.

According to Dr. Carolyn Logan, director of the Office of Teacher/Administrator Preparation and Certification for the Michigan Department of Education, officials are looking at a 1995 proposal for "individualized" teaching certificates, which might be "customized according to the qualifications each person brings, or doesn't bring, to the profession."

"Unfortunately [the proposal] got a 'no thank you'" in 1995, Logan says, because "it was viewed as a quick fix, which would devalue the standard teaching certificate."

But now, Logan and her staff are devising ways to bring the proposal back. "The timing is much better because of the huge amount of publicity surrounding the pending teacher shortage," she says. Furthermore, "there are particularly vital subject areas in which Michigan is coming up short, for example, in physics, math, chemistry, and foreign languages." Logan also says minorities and males are underrepresented in Michigan's teacher population, a lack of diversity that justifies "looking beyond the traditional candidate."

This means offering incentives that historically have been used mostly in the private sector. For example, Logan believes teacher recruitment eventually will include "recruitment packages" in which school districts, out of desperation, offer prospective teachers a signing bonus, pay moving expenses, and even pre-arrange home mortgages, as a way of attracting experienced and certified teachers to their faculties.

Logan believes that as teacher salaries in-

crease, teaching will become more attractive to men, who come in and tend to stay. "Some of them migrate to administration, because of higher salaries there," she says. "They move up for the increased pay."

Over the next year or so, Logan's staff intends to design a process through which people with baccalaureate degrees can receive credit for the skills and credentials they bring to the profession of teaching and get the training they need in the areas where they are lacking.

The active part of such a program would focus on the skills, information, and training prospective teachers need. For instance, Logan says, "Does a prospective teacher need courses in 'human development' to understand better how to work with children, or do they already have those skills through kids, grandchildren, or church?"

Logan wants to come up with an expedited certification plan that satisfies all the necessary requirements and try to sell that plan to the various educational institutions and offices that would have to sign off on it. She envisions a certification process that is short, intensive, and would "equip the candidate with the essentials, plus a mentor."

One problem yet to be worked out is how to attach academic credit to the program, so that it would count for graduate school. "But with the right program in place, Michigan could greatly expand its pool of teacher candidates and begin placing them at a far quicker pace than we can now," Logan says.

Michigan's plan, should it be fully developed and implemented, could be a year away, or more. To contact the Office of Teacher/Administrator Preparation and Certification, call (517) 373-6505.


in action," said Dr. C. Emily Feistritzer, president of NCEI and co-author of a state-by-state analysis of alternative teacher certification programs. "People from all walks of life are stepping forward to meet the projected demand for teachers," she added. "Many of these individuals already have at

least a bachelor's degree, so the old model of training teachers in undergraduate education programs does not work. States are aggressively meeting the challenge by creating new training and licensing avenues for

people to enter teaching." Besides helping to solve the teacher supply crisis, these alternatively certified teachers bring diversity and a wealth of experience to the classroom. They come from business, industry, the professions, and the military and can teach students from first-

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## LEGISLATIVE ACTION

**Charter school cap to remain for now**

The Legislature will not consider in September or October a measure to raise Michigan's charter school cap. A bill to raise the cap was tabled before the summer recess. The current cap on university-chartered schools is 150; the bill would increase this cap by 25 per year, up to 225 in 2002. The last chance for the bill to be considered this year would be if the Legislature reconvenes briefly after the November elections. Failing that, the bill will be extinguished and have to be reintroduced in the next Legislature.

**School administrators might access police database**

S.B. 945, sponsored by state Sen. Leon Stille, R-Spring Lake, would give school administrators limited access to the Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN). This is the same data bank that police personnel use to check license

plate numbers for traffic violations and other information. Administrators say they have had problems with suspicious or abandoned cars near schools and in school parking lots. This bill would allow school officials to learn the vehicle registration information of any vehicle within 1,000 feet of school property. The bill has been passed by the Senate and now passed out of the House Education Committee. It has not yet been voted on by the full House.

**Mercury in schools to be eliminated**

State Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, has introduced S.B. 1262 to prohibit schools to purchase, store, or use free-flowing mercury, or to use a scientific lab instrument containing mercury, after 2004. High levels of exposure to mercury may cause damage to the central nervous system and internal organs, and even death. The Department of Environmental Quality has reported 14 mercury spills in schools since 1994. This bill has been passed by the Senate, and referred to the House Committee on Education where, at press time, it re-

mained. Mercury encapsulated and secure, as in certain light switches, would not be affected.

**Teacher certification may require reading disorder training**

H.B. 4378, introduced by state Rep. Bob Brown, D-Dearborn Heights, would require the superintendent of public instruction to establish new standards for diagnosing students with reading disorders and for providing those students with specialized training in reading. If passed, all teachers in training will be required to take a course in reading disorders. Since it is required for all certifications, all new teachers must take the course regardless of whether they teach chemistry, calculus, Spanish, or physical education.

Currently a teacher-in-training is required to have six hours of reading methods for elementary certification and three hours for secondary certification. According to proponents of the bill, this training does not emphasize recognizing reading dis-

orders, such as dyslexia, and how to teach students with these problems. As a result, they claim, the disorders go undiagnosed and many of those students fail to achieve their academic potential. The House passed the bill and it now moves to the Senate, with very limited time left in this session.

**School gift procedures proposed**

As increasing numbers of alumni give significant financial support to their former high schools, one legislator believes mandatory procedures are required for school districts handling the investment of monetary gifts. Rep. Scott Schachleton, R-Sault Ste. Marie, has introduced H.B. 5786, which establishes procedures for transferring such gifts to a community foundation or educational foundation for management. The bill would govern how the money is handled. At press time, the bill was before the Education Committee.

# Legislator pushes for "character development" in public schools

*Bill cites national programs as model for teaching kids values*

On Feb. 15, state Rep. Valde Garcia, R-St. Johns, introduced a bill to amend the Michigan Revised School Code to include a K-12 curriculum requirement for a program in "character development."

The content of the program would have to be the "same or similar to the Character Counts! program or the Character First! education series, be secular in nature, and stress character qualities such as attentiveness, patience, and initiative," according to House legislative analyst J. Hunault.

The Character Counts! program is the brainchild of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, a nationwide nonpartisan organization that is leading the rapidly growing "character education" movement. The program aims to "fortify the lives of America's young people with consensus ethical values called the 'six pillars of character'" which are "trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship," says the program's Web site, [www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org).

The Character First! program was developed by the Oklahoma-based Character Training Institute, an organization that provides character training for employees in the workplace.

Character First! promotes values including "alertness, attentiveness, self-control, kindness, forgiveness, and truthfulness," according to its Web site, [www.characterfirst.org](http://www.characterfirst.org).

A third program, not mentioned in Garcia's bill, is the Character Education Partnership of Washington, D.C. The CEP Web site ([www.character.org](http://www.character.org)) describes the organization as "a nonpartisan coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to developing moral character and civic virtue in our nation's youth as one means of creating a more compassionate and responsible society." CEP—which includes school employee unions, school board and administrator associations, and the PTA—has developed "eleven principles of effective character education" which it believes are key to instilling "core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, and honesty" in students.

Michigan State University Extension—which addresses "community-based issues in many areas including agriculture, natural resources, community and economic development, families, and children"—takes part in the Character Counts! program. According to its Web site, [www.msue.msu.edu](http://www.msue.msu.edu), it offers character "training and curriculum for adults and teens in several locations across Michigan." The training features materials to assist adults and even teenagers in teaching children in five different age groups about character.

In Oct. 1996, the Michigan State Board of Education adopted a policy encouraging "public schools to provide character education focusing on principles" similar to those

found in Character Counts! and which Garcia's bill seeks to promote.

Garcia's bill was referred to the House Education Committee, where it has yet to be voted on.

# New student locker search law in effect

*Districts must formulate, enforce policies by October deadline*

On May 1, Gov. Engler signed a bill that attempts to define and clarify the proper procedures for conducting locker searches in Michigan public schools.

Public Act 87 of 2000, which took effect immediately upon receiving the governor's approval, states that "a pupil who uses a locker that is the property of a school district . . . is presumed to have no expectation of privacy in that locker or that locker's content." In general, courts have held that the higher the expectation of privacy, the greater the justification needed by government employees to make a lawful search.

The bill requires school boards to adopt a policy on searches of pupils' lockers and locker contents within 180 days of passage, which is Oct. 27, 2000. The policy must state that, in the course of a search conducted pursuant to the policy, "the privacy rights of the pupil shall be respected regarding any items that are not illegal or against school policy." The school boards must supply students and their parents with a copy of the school's new policy. At the end of July, the superintendent of public instruction made available a model policy which local school boards may adopt.

Once the policy is implemented, the statute permits a public school principal or his or her designee to search a student's locker and contents at any time, as long as the published policy is followed. Any law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the school may assist the school personnel.

The law provides that "any evidence obtained as a result of a search of a pupil's locker . . . shall not be inadmissible in any court because the search violated this section, violated the board approved policy or because no policy was adopted."

The text of the bill can be read at the following Web site: [michiganlegislature.org/text/publicact/1999-2000/pa008700.htm](http://michiganlegislature.org/text/publicact/1999-2000/pa008700.htm).

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# Future education majors score below state average on SAT

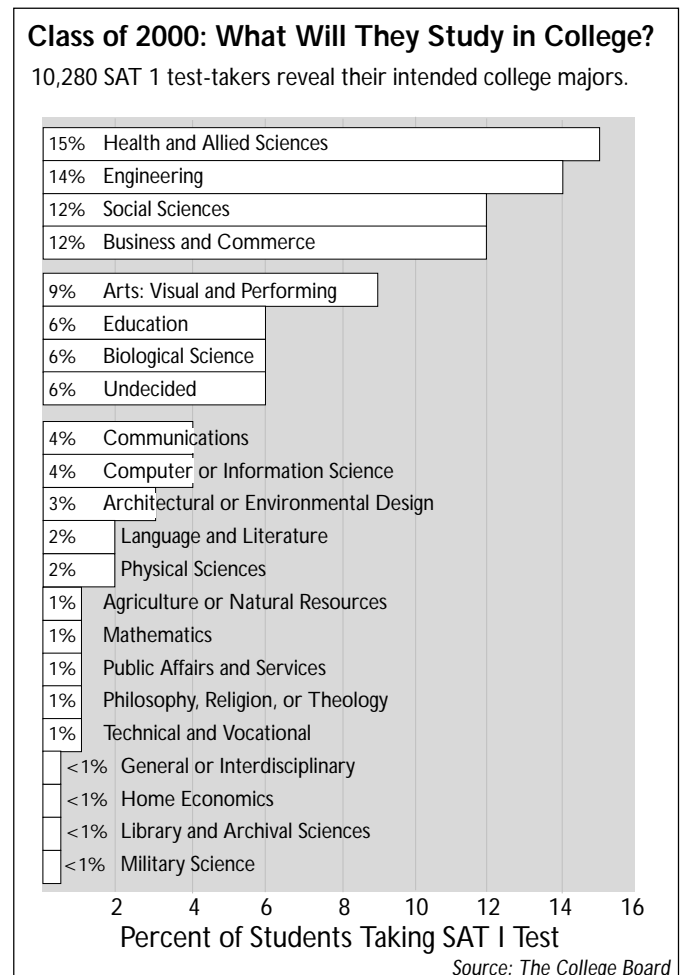
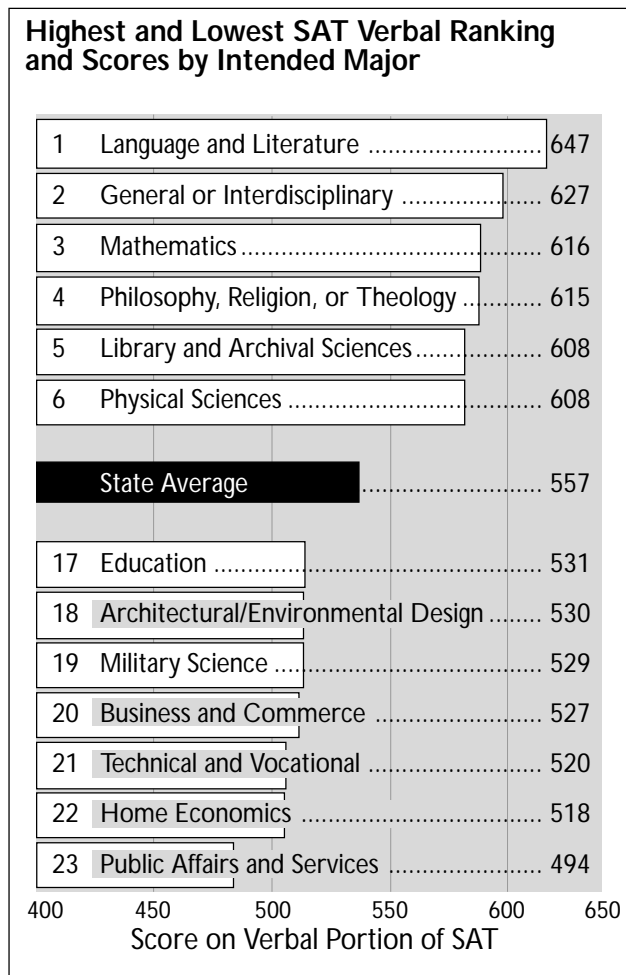
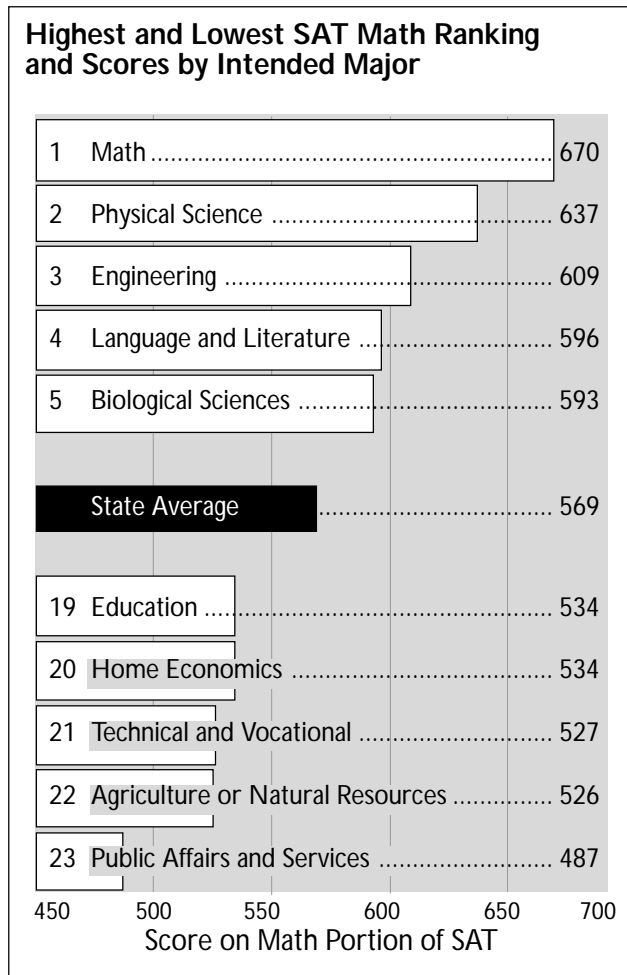
*Report: performance subpar for likely teachers*

A recently released summary of SAT scores for the Michigan high school class of 2000 reveals that students intending to major in education scored below the state average in both math and verbal performance. According to "2000 Profile of College Bound Seniors," a report from the College Board, the organization that administers the

SAT, 10,280 Michigan high school students from the class of 2000 took the SAT I test. The report presents SAT math and verbal scores and also the students' "intended college major," chosen from 23 categories. The tables below show the math and verbal scores and intended college major for the highest and lowest performing students.

Of concern to many educators is the fact that the highest performing students are not choosing education as a field of study in college. Of the 6 percent of students who selected education as a major, their average math score is 35 points below the state average. The average verbal score for education majors is 26 points below the state average.

This is not to say that all teachers are coming from this pool. In fact, many education experts believe that future teachers should major in a non-education subject area, such as math or biology, to develop content mastery, and supplement their major course work with education theory and practice classes.



# State releases school graduation and dropout numbers

*Report tells which districts Proposal 1 would affect*

In September, the Michigan Department of Education released its report on the 1998-99 graduation and dropout rates for the state's 555 state school districts, including 18 public school academies. The State Aid Act requires the Department of Education to provide the Legislature with this annual "District Membership Retention Report."

The report this year has added significance due to Proposal 1, an education reform initiative scheduled to appear on the November ballot. If approved, the state would be required to provide tax-funded vouchers for nonpublic school tuition for students in districts whose 1998-99 graduation rates were below two-thirds. The average district graduation rate is 81.12 percent.

According to the report, seven districts qualify for immediate vouchers, and prominent on the list is the 170,000-student Detroit City School District. Vouchers will not apply in any of the other districts, unless a majority of school board members or local residents later votes them in. (See story on page 1.)

The report also lists 188 school districts with graduation rates over 90 percent, with 76 of those being over 95 percent and 15 achieving a 100-percent rate.

The entire report can be accessed via Internet at [www.mde.state.mi.us/reports/distmembret.pdf](http://www.mde.state.mi.us/reports/distmembret.pdf).

Districts graduating less than 66.67% of their students			Districts graduating 100 percent of their students		
District	Graduation Rate	Enrollment	District	Graduation Rate	Enrollment
Buena Vista (Saginaw) Schools	51.77%	1,745	Bear Lake Schools	100%	
Coleman Community Schools	52.30%	1,106	Caro Community Schools	100%	
Holton Public Schools	54.39%	1,257	Fowler Public Schools	100%	
Inkster City Schools	20.57%	1,749	Free Soil Community Schools	100%	
Mackinaw City Public Schools	54.45%	253	Ishpeming Public Schools	100%	
Vanderbilt Area Schools	60.61%	324	Leland Public Schools	100%	
Detroit City Schools	46.06%	173,557	Les Cheneaux Community Schools	100%	
<b>Total Students</b>		<b>179,991</b>	Manton Consolidated Schools	100%	
			Marenisco Schools	100%	
			North Muskegon Public Schools	100%	
			Pickford Public Schools	100%	
			Port Hope Community Schools	100%	
			Posen Consolidated Schools	100%	
			Tekonsha Community Schools	100%	
			Wakefield Schools	100%	
Districts just over the cutoff for Proposal 1 vouchers (Graduation rates between 66.67% and 71.99%)					
Adrian City Schools	68.94%	4,394	Highland Park City Schools	67.05%	3,606
Albion Public Schools	71.84%	2,081	Jackson Public Schools	66.89%	7,384
Beecher (Flint) Community Schools	68.84%	2,762	Lincoln Park Public Schools	69.37%	5,555
Belding Area Schools	71.55%	2,581	Mancelona Public Schools	66.92%	1,066
Benton Harbor Area Schools	69.92%	5,883	Marcellus Community Schools	71.67%	1,078
Berrien Springs Public Schools	69.79%	1,684	Monroe Public Schools	69.72%	7,002
Brimley Area Schools	70.60%	585	Morley Stanwood Community Schools	70.89%	1,604
Cadillac Area Public Schools	71.65%	3,821	North Branch Area Schools	71.87%	2,598
Camden-Frontier Schools	67.81%	684	Northport Public Schools	69.56%	302
Clarkston Community Schools	68.42%	7,074	Pinconning Area Schools	67.07%	2,172
Coloma Community Schools	69.03%	2,346	Pontiac City Schools	69.23%	12,805
Durand Area Schools	68.26%	2,148	River Rouge Schools	67.85%	2,548
Eaton Rapids Public Schools	67.93%	3,273	River Valley Schools	70.42%	1,324
Eau Claire Public Schools	71.86%	899	Springport Public Schools	67.36%	1,065
Ferndale Public Schools	70.98%	4,730	<b>Total Students</b>		<b>120,187</b>
Flint City Schools	69.95%	25,133			



## STUDENT FOCUS

# Byrd soars at Saginaw public school

*Busy senior juggles academics, work, and community service*

The alarm goes off at 6:35 a.m. It's the start of another school day for Javanese Byrd, a senior at public Arthur Hill High School in Saginaw. Most of her classmates also are getting up at the same time, but unlike them, Javanese has had only 5 1/2 hours of sleep.

There are things to be done, after all. The National Honor Society student not only maintains a 3.8 grade point average in her classes—which include French, Astronomy, World Literature, Yearbook, and Broadcast Journalism—she also makes time for the Pep Club, Student Government, the Black Studies Club, community service, and, until recently, girls' varsity basketball.

"She's personable and outgoing, an easy-to-like kid, but basketball at this level wasn't her cup of tea" says Vonnice Killmer, Arthur Hill girls' basketball coach. "I think she'd really rather spend her time in extracurricular activities like Student Government, where she is so gifted."

Student Government is not the only area where Javanese is gifted. Her responsibilities in putting the high school's yearbook together include the demanding and all-important task of coordinating the senior pictures. "Javanese is an upbeat girl who has the follow-through to handle a big section of our yearbook," says Patsy Procuero, a journalism teacher.

Javanese also is one of only eight students who are receiving training and daily hands-on experience with the television equipment in Arthur Hill's full-service television studio. Dave Kabobel, who teaches Arthur Hill's broadcast journalism class, oversees Javanese and his other students as they prepare and broadcast a live 8-minute

show to the closed circuit TVs mounted in each of the school's classrooms. The broadcasts cover school announcements, upcoming school events, interviews with new teachers, and footage from recent athletic events.

Javanese's experience with broadcasting has made her reconsider her career aspirations. Whereas before she was interested in health services, she now wants to explore opportunities as a TV journalist. "The competition is fierce," she says, "almost like in acting. I know I'd have to start out as a news reporter at a local TV station, but I'd like to work for a network like CNN someday."

Javanese also is busy socially and off campus. Recently, she was elected to the school's Homecoming Court. And three days each week, she works in the daycare center at the nearby YMCA, where she watches and plays with the kids from 4:30 to 9 p.m. After work, she does her homework until midnight or later. On Saturdays she works with the Ivyettes, a teen group that performs community service, such as raising money for food baskets for the



Senior Javanese Byrd is one of only eight students in teacher Dave Kabobel's broadcast journalism class. Her school's full-service lab provides students with experience appearing before cameras and using lighting equipment, a soundboard and character generator, and electronic editing tools.

homeless at Thanksgiving.

What's next for Javanese? In her junior year, she applied to and was accepted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She remains undecided about which school to attend next, but one thing she's

sure of is that her time in high school has been great.

"I love Arthur Hill," she says. "If I had a chance to start all over from 9<sup>th</sup> grade I'd still come here."

## TEACHER FOCUS

# Teacher throws away the book on literacy

*Former nurse uses new method to help struggling students read*

She is a former nurse with no teaching certificate or degree in education. But Nora Chahbazi is as dedicated, passionate, and effective a teacher as you will find anywhere.

Chahbazi is the owner and primary instructor at Ounce of Prevention Reading Center in Flushing. The center offers reading assistance to children and adults for whom traditional methods of teaching reading, such as phonics, have not been effective.

Chahbazi employs a new reading method called "Phono-Graphix" to teach her students. She discovered Phono-Graphix in the book "Why Our Children Can't Read" by Diane McGuinness, professor of psychology at the University of South Florida.

"After just a few hours with Phono-Graphix, my daughter could read better than she ever had in her life," Chahbazi explains. "She went from struggling with reading pages, to reading whole chapters in just a few hours of work."

Chahbazi's success at teaching her daughter to read led her to help her friends' children with their reading. Soon she enrolled in a course to be trained as a reading therapist in Phono-Graphix, and shortly thereafter she



Former nurse Nora Chahbazi founded her Ounce of Prevention Reading Center in Flushing to help students who were struggling to read under traditional teaching methods.

opened her center.

"There are thousands of people like me and my family who need help. I just want to give them a chance," she says. "I love doing this."

At the center, students ranging in age from 3 to 67 are instructed according to

the Phono-Graphix method, which Chahbazi says can help beginning readers as well as those in need of remedial education. Her center, in fact, works closely with local teachers to provide remediation services for students who need them. She also trains parents and

teachers in the Phono-Graphix method so that they in turn can use it to teach other children to read.

Phono-Graphix, says Chahbazi, is the antithesis of traditional methods of reading instruction, which teach students symbols (letters) and the corresponding sounds they "make" and emphasize spelling rules and memorization. Phono-Graphix operates in reverse, building off of what students already know about sounds and speech. Phono-Graphix students are taught that the sounds they know can be represented in print by "sound pictures," or letter combinations.

"This 'sound picture' approach works on almost everyone, including dyslexics and students with learning disabilities," says Chahbazi. "Studies have shown that almost all children instructed in Phono-Graphix—students who struggled with traditional reading methods—achieved their grade level or better in just 12 hours."

Through her training seminars, Chahbazi hopes to expose teachers across the state to the Phono-Graphix method over the next few years, so that more students who struggle with reading can be taught this way.

"The most rewarding part of this program is when the students' eyes light up and they finally 'get it,'" she says. "Some of my students have been through years of traditional remedial reading programs, with no avail, and this program gives them new hope and makes them realize they can learn to read."



# Ann Arbor foundation funds private school boom

## *K-8 schools, college part of new Catholic network*

Domino's Pizza founder Tom Monaghan, after receiving nearly \$1 billion from the sale of his business, is devoting his resources to building a network of primary, secondary, and post-secondary Catholic educational institutions.

Through the Ave Maria Foundation, of which Monaghan is the principal benefac-

tor, this feature encourages cooperative learning and mutual assistance between older and younger pupils.

The Ave Maria Foundation also supports four other schools in the Ann Arbor area that use various teaching methods. Two of them are Shepard Montessori Schools in Milan and Ann Arbor, which opened in 1997

funding. The Ave Maria Foundation offered to step in on the condition that Huron Valley become a Catholic School, which it has agreed to do. Changes include a weekly Mass for all students and Catholic religious education. Paul Roney, executive director of the Ave Maria Foundation, told the *Ann Arbor News* that neither the foundation nor the local diocese will take an active role in running Huron Valley. The school, located in downtown Ypsilanti, enrolls 180 students.

In addition to supporting K-8 education, the Ave Maria Foundation also purchased a large parcel of land in the Ann Arbor Domino's Farms complex and contributed it to the long-established Ann Arbor Gabriel Richard High School for future building of a new Catholic high school.

The foundation is also active in higher education. In 1998, it underwrote the founding of Ave Maria College, a co-ed, four-year liberal arts institution located in Ypsilanti. The college offers degrees in three major fields of study, with nearly a dozen

others planned. "All are built around a comprehensive, intellectually challenging core curriculum, and an active campus life that emphasizes piety, evangelism and charitable service," according to Foundation spokesman Bill Koshelnyk.

In 1999, Ave Maria College became Ave Maria University with the addition of St. Mary's College of Orchard Lake, in Oakland County. "With its 115-year tradition, St. Mary's offers 16 majors with special focus on pre-medical and other pre-professional programs, as well as an increased emphasis on theology and philosophy," says Koshelnyk. "In addition, the university operates an extension campus, Ave Maria College of the Americas, located in San Marcos, Nicaragua."

The most recent addition to Ave Maria University is the new law school, which began classes in the fall of 2000, with 75 students. The school claims it is "unique in approaching legal study specifically from the perspective of the Catholic moral and intellectual tradition that has advanced the concepts of natural law, individual rights, and human dignity on which our system of justice is based."

The law school, located in Ann Arbor, spent \$4 million renovating a former 84,000-square-foot office building on 11 acres. According to the college, the incoming students hail from 39 universities from 31 states and Canada, with a median LSAT score in the top 21 percent.



The Ave Maria Foundation funds Spiritus Sanctus academies, K-8 Catholic schools run by an order of nuns. The Ann Arbor school pictured above captured a statewide architectural design award this year.

tor, eight K-8 schools are up and running and accepting enrollment. According to Dan Guernsey of the Private Catholic School Network, the schools feature strong family involvement, character formation, a positive peer environment, and religious instruction based on the catechism of the Catholic Church.

According to Guernsey, the schools' approach to education has received such tremendous support in the Ann Arbor area, the foundation is already considering ways to franchise the concept throughout the United States. "Our goal is to do whatever we can to open up independent Catholic schools," he says. "We'll do whatever we can to help them." Guernsey regularly receives inquiries from other states, he adds.

The foundation opened its first school, Spiritus Sanctus Academy, in 1997 at the Domino's Farms complex in Ann Arbor Township, and three other schools, each also called Spiritus Sanctus Academy, quickly followed. By design each academy has a total enrollment of about 100, electing to feature small multi-grade classes, typically kindergarten, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8. According to

and 1998, respectively. According to the foundation, these schools use the well known "progressive Montessori pedagogy," including "child-driven progress," which school officials claim is especially appropriate for students who struggle or excel in different subjects. They have a total enrollment of approximately 60 with both sites expecting to expand to 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes. The Milan school was formerly a Catholic school that had been closed for some time.

Another school, called Agnus Dei, uses a non-graded structure. Students progress at their own rate, but within a traditional curriculum. In this case as well the "three room" school concept is used with pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, grades 1-3, and grades 4-8. Enrollment there is also around 60.

The foundation's network also includes the Huron Valley school which, Principal Tom Kotyak told the *Ann Arbor News* in March, originally opened under an affiliation with the Word of God Church. But falling enrollment and financial difficulties made it necessary to find a new source of

### Tom Monaghan: The Man with the Vision



The variety of educational institutions supported by Ann Arbor's Ave Maria Foundation is impressive. This reflects the vision and personal drive of the \$260-million founder, chairman, and chief benefactor, Tom Monaghan. In 1998 Monaghan sold his worldwide Domino's Pizza operation for nearly \$1 billion. He retained ownership of the huge office building and 300 acres, which make up Domino's Farms in Ann Arbor. In that complex Monaghan maintains an office where, according to the Religious News Service, he "wants to work for God the rest of his life and die nearly broke."

The Ave Maria Foundation has quickly grown in both funding and scope of activity. In 1983, Monaghan started the Domino's Foundation, which began with assets of roughly \$8.5 million. Over the years he found a variety of Roman Catholic causes to support. When he sold his pizza business he changed the foundation's name to Ave Maria Foundation and donated another \$250 million, making it one of the largest foundations in Michigan.

Monaghan firmly believes that the lack of religious belief and practice is at the root of many

social problems. He told the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* last October, "All of the problems we hear about—the school system, teen pregnancy, crime, drugs, and on and on—when people talk about these things, they usually blame them on the breakdown in family. But they never go to the next step and ask why the breakdown in the family. It has to be because of the lack of religion."

Monaghan explains that his foundation provides the means for Catholic educators to explore new pedagogical directions. "The great genius of Christianity has been its ability to absorb the best of every culture it's encountered throughout history," Monaghan says. "Catholic scholarship is the sum of that inclusiveness, and we want to make our contribution by adding to the diversity of teaching approaches and school organization at all levels."

"Catholic education is in demand more than ever," he adds. "With the concern that's been voiced about access to quality education in the public districts, people of all faiths are clamoring to send their children to parochial schools. This puts tremendous stress on Catholic education facilities. We're in a position to supplement the Church's resources. We've taken on the economic burden of building and supporting schools that offer the virtues people expect of Catholic institutions, without causing more financial and operational complications for parishes and dioceses."

# Families come to Kumon

## *Alternative learning centers help struggling students*

Anna Dvorak is the bright daughter of college-educated parents, but the 9-year-old was struggling with math in the Alma schools.

Then her mother heard about a program in Mt. Pleasant that was having great success in teaching math. That led her to the Kumon Center of Mt. Pleasant, operated by Gene and Susan Kushion, both of whom are public school math teachers. Gene teaches geometry, advanced algebra, and trigonometry at the Midland Bullock Creek High School, while Sue teaches seventh-grade pre-algebra at the middle school in St. Louis.

Kumon Centers are a radical new import from Japan and are springing up across the United States and Canada. According to a recent issue of the organization's newsletter "Kumon New Quest," 2.5 million students are enrolled worldwide, including 75,000 in the U.S. and over 30,000 in Canada. Michigan already has 40 Kumon



Anna Dvorak completes her math lesson with the help of teacher Susan Kushion, who, with husband Gene, operates a "Kumon Center" in Mt. Pleasant. Students taught with the Kumon method advance according to individual ability rather than age or grade level.

Centers concentrated in suburban Detroit and larger cities in mid-Michigan.

Six years ago, the Kushions' twin daughters, then in third grade, were having math challenges of their own. Sue and Gene began to tutor them at home, but were frustrated with their slow progress. Being conscientious parents, they looked for outside help; a friend recommended a Kumon Center. The Kushions were so impressed with the progress made by their twins that two years later they accepted the oppor-

tunity to run the Kumon Center themselves. It is located in a large and comfortable Sunday school classroom at the First Methodist Church in downtown Mt. Pleasant.

Forty-three school children, from young elementary to late middle school, regularly visit this math teaching program. The Mt. Pleasant center is open from 4 to 7 p.m. five days a week. The students work a maximum of 20 minutes each day on their Kumon math lessons, either at the center or at home, but they do the lessons seven days a week. It seems like an old-fashioned approach. There are no calculators or computers allowed. Students use pencil and paper to do every calculation.

Any newly enrolling child takes a placement test to establish his or her skill level. School grade does not matter because the math is not taught as a class. It is all individualized. Students start at a comfortable level to help achieve success right away. That

KUMON continued on page 8



## Kumon

continued from page 7

builds confidence, and soon they are hooked on math: young kids eagerly learning math as fast as they can.

Upon entering a Kumon Center classroom, one finds children absolutely silent and focused intently on their papers. None of them generates any distractions or conversation. They are too committed to finishing their papers, because, in addition to accuracy, their speed is also counted. The children may have up to 10 pages of problems to do that day, but they are allowed only a maximum of two minutes per page. Approaching one minute per page is the goal of each student, for then they are demonstrating "mastery," and will be able to move on. If they take too much time, they "loop back," doing a set of papers over and over until they master it.

In his book "Every Child an Achiever: A Parent's Guide to the Kumon Method," author David W. Russell describes the philosophy of the Kumon system. "Because learning is teacher-driven in the typical educational system, children all too easily become passive agents in the learning process," Russell writes.

The Kumon Method turns that process upside-down. The goal of Kumon is to make learning a student-driven activity, to put the responsibility on the student, not on the teacher. It is common that students falter-

ing in math, after a year or more in a Kumon Center, achieves mastery of math at one or two grade levels above their own grade. Those who choose to can follow the program beyond differential and integral calculus. According to the Kumon Institute, "decades of experience with hundreds of thousands of students have shown that learning occurs most efficiently when two criteria are met: 1) The level of the material to be learned corresponds exactly to the learner's level of ability, and 2) the rate of progress is controlled by the students, not the teacher."

The Kumon Institute has been invited into hundreds of American schools to help thousands of students master math, and even reading, at their own pace. For her part, Anna Dvorak, after nine months in the program, is now scoring 40 out of 40 in her speed tests at public school, and she is still doing only 20 minutes of Kumon math daily.

As for Gene Kushion, with 29 years of teaching math in the public schools, he says, "Nothing I can do in the school classroom can give me the satisfaction I get from seeing the progress made by young students at our Kumon Center. There's no comparison."

For more information on Kumon, interested parties may call 1-800-ABC-MATH or visit the Kumon Institute's Web site at [www.kumon.com](http://www.kumon.com). The Kushions can be reached at (517) 773-9903.

## Remedial

continued from page 1

The estimate is conservative, Greene says, because it does not include the cost of college-level work that has been "watered down" but not classified as remedial, expenditures on technology by businesses to make up for employees' lack of basic skills, capital expenditures required to provide remedial education, and additional costs incurred because of the many people who require remedial education but never receive it.

Greene says the Michigan figure can be extrapolated to reach a national cost of \$16.6 billion per year for remedial education. But money isn't the only consideration, he adds. "The financial costs to provide remedial education are high, but the human costs of students failing to receive minimal skills are incalculably higher," he says.

"The failure of our schools is not mainly a dollar-and-cents problem," agrees Dr. Tom Bertonneau, an instructor at Central Michigan University. "It is, in fact, a measure of our own distance from an understanding of the nature of this tragedy that to have its maximum impact upon us, it must be expressed in terms of dollars and cents."

Bertonneau authored an essay, included in the study, that explains how poor education harms students. Dr. David W. Breneman, dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia and former president of Kalamazoo College, and Dr. Herbert Walberg, research professor of education and psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, provided additional commentary for the study.

Greene proposes three solutions to the growing need among students for remedial education: Competency tests required to graduate high school, a full or partial "money-back guarantee" offered by K-12 school districts, and increased school choice.

"While it is difficult to get educators to agree on the reasons for the problem, the focus of debate unquestionably revolves around whether elementary and secondary schools are doing an adequate job of teaching these skills," he says.

The problem of unprepared students extends even beyond math and reading, according to some educators. "Most of the students who come to us not only lack math and English skills, but they lack basic academic skills," says Janet Dettloff, chair of the Math and Sciences Division at Wayne County Community College. "They have no idea what is expected of them at the college level. They don't know how to take notes. They don't read the assigned material. And many of them don't even come to

class. How did they get through high school without these skills?"

### Community forums

Greene and the Mackinac Center went on the road in September to get opinions about the study's findings from educators, business leaders, and citizens throughout Michigan at a series of six public forums, attended by over 250 people.

Prominent leaders from the K-12, higher education, and business communities in Grand Rapids, Saginaw, Lansing, Ypsilanti, Traverse City, and Southfield provided formal responses to the problem of remedial education, which was followed by audience interaction and participation.

Representing educators from the K-12 system were Dr. Patricia Newby, superintendent of Grand Rapids Public Schools; Dr. Michael Shibley, superintendent of Rockford Public Schools near Grand Rapids; Mr. Justin King, executive director of the Michigan Association of School Boards; Mr. Ryan Donlan, superintendent of Bay-Arenac Community High School; Mr. Michael Krigelski, superintendent of Airport Community Schools near Ypsilanti; and Dr. Jayne Mohr, assistant superintendent of Traverse City Area Public Schools.

Higher education panelists included Dr. Arend "Don" Lubbers, president of Grand Valley State University; Dr. Leonard Plachta, president emeritus of Central Michigan University; Dr. Thomas Brennan, former Michigan Supreme Court justice and president of Thomas M. Cooley Law School; Dr. Thomas Sullivan, president of Cleary College; Dr. Laurie Chesley, dean for learning at Northwestern Michigan College; and Dr. Joe Champagne, former president of Oakland University and current dean at Macomb Community College.

Business and industry leaders included Mr. Charles Stoddard, president of Grand Bank; Mr. Regan Wieland, CEO of Plyforms, Inc. of Bay City; Mr. James Barrett, president of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Doug Bishop, former chairman of the Traverse Area Chamber of Commerce; and Mr. Lloyd Reuss, former president of General Motors and current executive dean for advanced technologies at Focus: HOPE.

Copies of Greene's study are available from the Mackinac Center at 517-631-0900 or on the Internet at [www.mackinac.org](http://www.mackinac.org). Video clips of the forum panelists soon will be available online as well.

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Frank Webster is the recipient of the Lives, Fortunes, and Sacred Honor Award of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, June 5, 1998, for pursuit of better education for Michigan children.



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## Tony deserves a chance

We at Lutheran Special Education Ministries believe Tony deserves a chance.

That's why—since 1873—we've been helping kids like Tony—kids who have special learning needs—to receive a Christian education and lead productive lives.

Tony is not alone. According to the U.S. Department of Education, at least 1 out of every 10 school-age children in the U.S. today has a special learning need. In 1997-98 in Michigan there were more than 20,000 kids who struggle with learning because of their special learning needs. (Michigan Department of Education)

For us to help a small group of kids with special learning needs within a resource room will cost \$52,000.00 in a school year. (And next year, the cost will rise.)

That's why we'd like your help. Here are two recommendations:

1. If you know of a kid like Tony, a kid whose parents would like him to receive a Christian education—but hasn't because of his special learning needs—please let us know. You can call or write us at the address below. Or fax us at (313) 368-0159.

2. If you want to help us with kids like Tony, please send your tax-deductible donation to the address below. We are a 501(c)3 organization that receives no governmental support.

Thank you.

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# School defies its demographics

## Low-income students meet principal's high expectations in urban Detroit

An animated Emily Shahan leads her class of peppy students in reading aloud a scribble of numbers, symbols and letters—funny-looking shapes that literally are Greek.

"Gamma to the power of alpha, times gamma to the power of beta, divided by gamma to the power of alpha, equals . . ." they read off the chalkboard before them. Shahan shuts off the recitation before anyone can venture an answer, then taps a student to explain how to solve the math problem.

"When you see multiply signs, you add the exponents. When you see division signs, you subtract the exponents," Adriana Reaves volunteers confidently—and correctly.

Adriana is 11. She and her fifth-grade classmates are studying algebra, a subject usually not taught until high school, or perhaps in suburban middle schools or other advanced programs. But this is an elementary school, and it stands smack in the middle of urban desolation a couple of miles from downtown Detroit.

Requiring fourth- and fifth-graders to study algebra is the most dramatic example of the high academic expectations at Owen School, whose students have shown extraordinary achievement for about a decade even though 80 percent are poor and more than 90 percent are black. Nearly all live in a dreary neighborhood where, on many blocks, vacant lots overgrown with tall weeds outnumber the dilapidated wooden houses still standing.

In cities across the country, and elsewhere in Detroit, similar schools that enroll mostly poor, minority students have generally lagged far behind in the new standardized tests being used to decide who moves to the next grade or gets a diploma.

This persistent pattern of failure has emerged as a main point of political debate about education, with everyone from President Clinton and his potential successors to congressional leaders and governors calling for tough action to fix public schools where

low-income students aren't learning as they should.

But there is no worrisome "achievement gap" between Owen students and peers elsewhere. Since 1991, better than 80 percent of Owen students have passed the standardized tests in math, reading, writing and science that Michigan requires of fourth- and fifth-graders each year.

For two consecutive years in the late 1990s, every fourth-grader at Owen mastered the math test. In 1998-99, the latest year for which scores are available, 94 percent of the fourth-graders passed the math test, and 80 percent passed the reading test. Ninety-four percent of the fifth-graders passed the science test.

Owen outperformed students statewide by 22 percentage points in math, 21 in reading and 56 in science. Owen students outdid peers in Grosse Pointe, an affluent lakeshore suburb, by 11 points in math, 3 in reading and 29 in science.

Only in writing did Owen trail the state (17 points) and Grosse Pointe (36 points). But it was an off year for Owen: The passing rate in writing had been a stratospheric 94 percent a year earlier, before inexplicably tumbling to 42 percent.

Owen is unusual but not unique in having low-income students with high test scores. Five studies published in the last year have identified several hundred schools around the country that have defied statistical odds and beaten the achievement gap. The number of such schools is comparatively low, though: the Education Department has counted about 7,000 schools that serve the poor and rate as academically low-performing.

The exceptions to the pattern of low achievement seem to disprove the notion that demographics is academic destiny. But there remains a bedeviling question about the schools where low-income students nonetheless reach high levels of achievement: How do they do it?

"People want to know what my secret

formula is so they can manufacture it and spread it around everywhere," says Patsy Burks, Owen's principal for a dozen years. "I can't tell them. I don't know what it is. There's too many things you have to do. It's not just one thing. It's a combination."

Almost by happenstance, Burks does provide a clue about her educational philosophy—and it's hardly a secret—when she hears the name of Ronald Edmonds.

"Oh, oh," she exclaims. "My hero."

Edmonds was a pioneering education

havoc with lesson planning at similar schools, is also relatively low, though the school keeps no statistics.

Burks accomplishes all this with the same resources as similar Detroit schools.

Margaret Horner, leader of the parent council, describes the experience of her three children at the school as "fantastic. The teachers . . . expected more from students than teachers did at the other schools my children attended. Other places you could try hard if you wanted to. Here, they make you try hard."

As she finishes lunch in the school's tiny lounge, second-grade teacher Lynda Bartak says, "This is a nurturing school, in all the good ways that word implies. But there is a firmness. We expect you to do your work and complete it and be proud of it."

Burks says Edmonds supplied her with what she calls "do-how," but she has clearly improvised a bag of her own tricks.

When Burks arrived at Owen a dozen years ago, she met with teachers weekly to plot how to raise test scores. They devised a strategy to rebuild the curriculum around the content of the tests and assign the most experienced teachers to administer them in small groups. They send notes home to remind parents to send children to bed early the night before testing, then eat a good breakfast before coming to school.

"I'm looking at all the variables that make the best testing situation," Burks says. Self-assured teachers in groups as small as a dozen children help calm down students so they'll do their best. And she makes no apologies for what critics might scorn as teaching to the tests or what others might describe as sensibly realigning the curriculum.

"It's not fair to test something that's not been taught," Burks maintains.

Samuel Casey Carter, author of a Heritage Foundation report on Owen and 20 similar schools, suggests Owen hasn't dumbed down its curriculum with the changes because Michigan has "an exceptionally hard test. It's one of the few of these exams that's actually a serious test."

Carter says he independently verified Owen's test scores, which appear to be corroborated by scores in lower grades on the Metropolitan Achievement Test-7—in his opinion, another of the better standardized tests.

To increase contact with parents, who often won't show for teacher conferences or parent council meetings, Burks has also come up with some novel tactics. Report cards aren't sent home with students, but must be picked up by parents.

Instead of regular council meetings, there is a monthly activity featuring students to attract proud parents. Once, the distribution of family photo albums was used as a lure.

Visitors must ring a doorbell to enter the school because the outside doors are kept locked. Few outsiders gain admittance. The principal rejects most requests to visit.

"I really suspect anybody who comes to my school and says it's a phenomenon. It's not—if you're teaching," Burks says. "It's just sort of dedication to the job."

*This article was written by Kenneth L. Johnson and is reprinted with permission from The Washington Post.*

### MSU Professor Ronald Edmonds' Seven Characteristics of Effective Schools

1. A safe and orderly environment
2. A climate of high expectations of every student
3. A principal who acts as an instructional leader
4. A staff with a clear educational mission
5. A priority on classroom instruction in essential skills
6. Parental involvement
7. Frequent testing to monitor student progress

professor at Michigan State University best known for his "effective schools" research, which he conducted by visiting schools that worked and identifying their common characteristics. What Edmonds discovered wasn't a whiz-bang curriculum or a magical teaching technique, but education's workmanlike equivalent of football's three yards and a cloud of dust.

His research isolated seven characteristics of effective schools: a safe and orderly environment, a climate of high expectations of every students, a principal who acts as an instructional leader, a staff with a clear educational mission, a priority on classroom instruction in essential skills, parental involvement and frequent testing to monitor student progress.

It was 25 years ago that Edmonds completed the first round of his research, which enjoyed a boomlet of popularity before losing out to new educational fads that weren't as difficult to implement and weren't based on careful study. He died in 1983.

"Some of the principles he had and believed in made a lot of sense to me," recalls Burks. "I think the most important was: All children can learn."

Edmonds has another disciple in Michael Cohen, assistant secretary of elementary and secondary education in the Department of Education.

"I started writing about this stuff in 1979, and it wasn't exactly a secret when I started writing," Cohen said. "We've known for a long time what it takes to make effective schools. The real question is, 'Do we have the will and the capacity to make them on a large scale?'"

Owen enjoys plenty of both from a dedicated principal who tries to make sure students get what they need from a hard-working, stable corps of well-trained teachers, all but one of them fully certified. Other inner-city schools suffer from a revolving door of inexperienced teachers still completing their professional training.

The school also benefits from small classes, so small that Burks wouldn't disclose their exact size. A year ago, the pupil-teacher ratio was 17-1, according to the state. She believes that student turnover, which causes



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## COMMENTARY

Michigan Education Report asked Michigan candidates for the U.S. Senate to provide a summary of their education proposals and policies. Below are the campaign statements of Republican candidate and incumbent Sen. Spencer Abraham, Democratic candidate U.S. Rep. Debbie Stabenow, and public school teacher and Libertarian candidate Michael Corliss.

## Flexibility and accountability are key to improving education



**Spencer Abraham**

Republican Spencer Abraham is Michigan's junior U.S. senator.

As the father of three young children, I consider improving education to be one of my top priorities in the U.S. Senate. I believe that educational power and resources should be in the hands of parents, who help their kids with homework and encourage them to succeed, and the teachers, principals, and school boards who alone can make classrooms places of learning and growth.

How do we achieve the goal of improved education for our children? We need to raise the quality of teachers—by provid-

ing resources for teacher professional development, teacher testing, and merit pay. We need to ensure that every Michigan student has access to a college education—by providing financial resources through tax incentives and scholarship programs.

We also need to recognize that every community is different. A small district in rural Martin, Mich., has very different needs from a large urban district in Detroit. Local school districts need to have options regarding how to spend federal education dollars. Washington is finally starting to recognize this with the adoption of the Flexibility in Education Act, known as Ed-Flex.

Ed-Flex is our attempt to free local schools from the burdens of the know-it-alls and the red tape in Washington. Ed-Flex gives every state a chance to waive the cumbersome rules, regulations, and red tape often associated with federal education programs. The state of Michigan participated in a demonstration project under Ed-Flex

and, as a result of its tremendous success, the waivers are now available across the country.

This year, we went one step further and included as part of the Educational Opportunities Act a voluntary demonstration program permitting up to 15 interested states and school districts to enter into an agreement with the U.S. Secretary of Education in which the states agree to specific academic improvement performance standards for their lowest performing students in return for the ability to consolidate federal funds and eliminate federal strings to better serve their neediest students.

We also need to recognize that qualified and dedicated teachers are an essential element in our goal to improve education. Teachers play a special and indispensable role in our children's education. Nothing can replace the positive and long-lasting impact a dedicated, knowledgeable teacher has on a child's learning process. Accordingly, the

Educational Opportunities Act includes the Teacher Empowerment Act (TEA), which provides states and districts with close to \$2 billion to develop and implement innovative professional development and teacher quality programs. Because the states and districts have the control of these monies, each program will be specifically designed to address the needs of the individual states and communities by the people closest to the schools: the teachers, administrators, and parents.

During the debate on the Educational Opportunities Act, I introduced and passed an amendment to ensure that states and districts would be able to use their TEA funding to implement teacher testing, merit-based pay, and tenure reform programs. These programs will help schools and teachers better pinpoint areas in need of additional professional development and appropriately reward outstanding performance. I also sup-

ABRAHAM continued on page 11

## Keep education dollars in local hands and out of Washington



**Michael Corliss**

Michael Corliss is a Michigan public school teacher and the Libertarian candidate for U.S. Senate.

As a public school teacher, I see firsthand, every day, the consequences of federal intrusion in the schools. Millions of dollars are siphoned out of local districts, much of it wasted by endless layers of education bureaucracy, and then a fraction of it, maybe, comes back home. Why does this happen?

Both the Democrats and the Republicans have promised for years that if we parents and educators will keep sending our tax dollars to Washington, they will use the money to improve the public schools. Of course, the exact opposite has occurred, as

Libertarians predicted it would.

When this country was founded over 200 years ago, the architects of the Constitution wisely decided that Congress would have no authority over education. They realized that education can work only when parents and educators—the people who actually know and care about the children in a particular school—have the ability to make the financial and educational decisions that are in those children's best interest. All dictates from Washington must be applied equally to all people, and politicians and bureaucrats hundreds of miles away cannot possibly know better than you do about what is best for your child.

Now, unfortunately, we have a different system from the one envisioned by Jefferson and Madison. This new system works like this: You are required to send your tax dollars to Washington. For every two dollars you send, one dollar comes back to your school, along with a laundry list of regulations limiting how you can spend it.

Why does this make sense to anyone?

This is just another example of politicians, from both of the old parties, trying to buy your vote with your own money. As you read the Christmas list of presents that my two Senate opponents promise, bear in mind that all of this will be paid for with your money, and that somewhere along the way, half of the money you send them just sort of disappears.

It's easy to see where the rest of your education dollars go, if you realize that the federal Department of Education is the biggest sinkhole of waste and cronyism in the entire country. Whenever a friend of the current administration, be it Republican or Democratic, needs a sinecure to tide him or her over for a while, he or she is usually given a cushy job at the Department of Education. Recently, a U.S. senator, who had been removed by her own constituency, was given a job there, which paid over \$150,000 per year. Her duties? She advised Congress on a program that ulti-

mately was never funded.

There are twice as many administrators in the Department of Education as there are in the average federal agency, and that is saying a lot. Several years ago, the Republicans made a series of promises to the American people. There were 10 of them, and they were dubbed the Contract with America. One of those promises was to get rid of this federal bureaucracy that maintains a stranglehold on education in this country, impoverishes schools, and stifles real reform and improvement. Unfortunately, this was the only one of the 10 planks of the Contract that was never introduced in Congress, even though it was the one that would have done the most to improve our schools.

I refuse to promise a basket full of goodies (along with a bigger tax bill) if you vote for me. Instead, I pledge now, that when I go to Washington, I will fight to stop the wasteful and destructive practice of let-

CORLISS continued on page 11

## The three P's of school safety: parents, prevention, and police



**Debbie Stabenow**

Democrat Debbie Stabenow represents Michigan's 8th congressional district.

We all know that government alone, at any level, cannot hope to solve the complex problem of school violence. But government must be a part of the solution. Together we must, with the "Michigan Million Mom March," get parents actively involved, provide resources to prevent violence, and add more school resource officers to deter school violence. We must do all we can to create classrooms where students can learn in the safe environments they deserve.

In February, six-year-old Kayla Rolland was killed by another six-year-old in her school outside of Flint. I have talked with parents, teachers, and students about how to form effective partnerships with local schools and communities to help combat the problem of violence in our schools.

I believe the keys to school safety can

be spelled out with three P's: parents, prevention, and police. My plan to make local schools and communities safer places to learn and work includes:

### Getting Parents Actively Involved

- Involve parents in efforts both inside and outside of the classroom to promote safe schools.
- Require parental involvement in the planning and implementation of student programs that are funded by federal grants.
- Recognize that preventing child abuse and neglect is critical to preventing violence in schools. Successful programs such as the Michigan Children's Trust Fund, which I founded in 1982, have provided at-risk parents with the skills and support they need to create loving and safe homes. These programs should be made a priority.

### Providing Resources to Prevent Violence

- Add school counselors, social workers, and teacher support personnel so that teachers can teach and other professionals can focus on students who need special attention.
- Integrate character education into school

curriculum to create good citizens as well as good students. Character education helps to instill values such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, fairness, citizenship, perseverance, courage, and self-discipline in our children.

- Encourage students to help each other through peer mediation and conflict resolution programs that further reduce the threat of school violence.
- Reduce class size so that teachers give students the attention they need to succeed in school.
- Support after-school programs that provide supervised, constructive activities for latch-key students.
- Create a National Center for School Safety and Youth Violence to provide a common source of effective school safety programs for schools and communities; to establish a toll-free number for students to seek help and anonymously report criminal activity; and to provide grants to develop innovative, new school safety programs in communities across the country.

### Keeping Our Schools Safe

- Add school resource officers to help keep schools safe by deterring school violence and serving as positive role models for students.

- Provide resources for safety technology and training through a matching grant program that will help schools afford metal detectors, security cameras, and other safety devices and offer security training for school personnel.

- Keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals by passing common-sense gun safety legislation that requires child safety locks, closes the loophole that allows guns to be purchased at gun shows without background checks, and enforces existing gun laws.

For more information about Rep. Stabenow, visit [www.stabenow2000.net](http://www.stabenow2000.net).

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COMMENTARY

# Abraham

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port the establishment of teacher tax deduction to help defray the cost of professional development expenses.

To help bring quality technology to our classrooms, last year I introduced the New Millennium Classrooms Act, a bill designed to provide incentives for businesses to donate high-quality computers and related equipment to K-12 schools. Endorsed by the National Education Association, my legislation specifically targets economically disadvantaged schools, allowing poorer schools to allocate more of their scarce resources to technology training for teachers, technology curriculum development, or infrastructure needs instead of forcing them to spend all of their funding on equipment shortfalls. Just this March, my bill passed the Senate by a vote of 96-2 as an amendment to another bill.

I also believe we can do more to help families pay for college. That's why I support the Affordable Education Act, which

expands Education Savings Accounts, expands qualified pre-paid tuition plans, includes tax relief for employer-provided educational assistance, and eliminates the 60-month limit on the student loan interest deduction.

Education will determine America's future. If we want better schools, then parents, teachers, and local leaders must have access to the resources and the flexibility to improve our schools, create greater opportunities for teacher professional development for teachers, and educate our children. If we want our children to prosper in the high-tech economy, then we must close the digital divide and encourage the study of math and science.

I am confident that, together, we can make America's schools the best in the world and provide our kids with the quality education they deserve.

For more information about Sen. Abraham, visit [www.Abraham2000.net](http://www.Abraham2000.net).

# Corliss

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ting federal politicians and bureaucrats dictate how your school will be run. I will fight to keep your education dollars, all of them, in your district. I will hold the Republicans' feet to the fire, and make them do what they promised they would do. I won't do it because I want votes, or because some lobbyist offered me a campaign contribution. I will do it because it is right and because it will help improve education in every school district in this country.

Libertarian candidate for U.S. Senate Michael Corliss teaches English and Drama at Livonia Stevenson High School. For more information about Mr. Corliss, visit [www.Corliss2000.org](http://www.Corliss2000.org).

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# Bush, Gore

continued from page 1

agree to "establish accountability systems, testing every student in reading and math," according to the Bush campaign Web site.

"I'm going to lift the burden of bureaucracy and give states and local folks more authority over federal education dollars than they've ever had before," Bush told a Washington conference sponsored by the Conservative Political Action Committee in January 2000.

Gore calls for an even larger federal role, proposing a \$170 billion "public education investment plan" paid over 10 years out of a trust fund and with 10 percent of the federal budget surplus. He also favors more federal programs to help families pay their education and job training costs, including tax deductions for college tuition; to set up "Life-Long Learning" investment accounts; and to establish a new "National Tuition Savings Program." The Department of Education will assume more state and local responsibilities, including the setting of teacher certification requirements and national achievement standards and the fund-

ing of education for early childhood years.

"Together, we must bring revolutionary change to our public schools. I want to work with parents, teachers, and principals to create the modern classrooms, higher standards, and similar class sizes your irreplaceable kid deserves," says Gore.



Vice President Al Gore, Democratic candidate for president.

ships to America's neediest children, allowing them to get the emergency help they should have," Bush told an audience in Los Angeles Sept. 9. "In any case, the federal government will no longer pay schools to cheat poor children." Gore opposes vouchers, although before accepting the vice presidential nomination Senator Joe Lieberman supported vouchers for students in the District of Columbia.

Both candidates support charter schools, but differ on details. Bush would leverage \$3 billion in federal funds to create 2,000 new charter schools. Gore would triple the number of charter schools by expanding existing programs.

### Math and science education

Acknowledging that American students perform particularly poorly in math and science compared with students in other countries, both candidates favor federal initiatives to address the problem.

Bush proposes to offer federal Pell

### Standards and accountability

Over the last 10 years, every state but Iowa has adopted standards in reading and math, and most states require students to be tested every year in both subjects. This movement for standards in measuring student progress and school accountability began at the federal level under President Bush and has continued ever since. Both candi-

and math standards set for grades 4, 8, and 12. He also calls for states, not districts, to set high school graduation requirements and administer a statewide high school exit exam.

### Teacher quality

Both candidates agree that teacher quality is a vital element in the effort to improve education, but differ in ideas to improve that quality.

Bush would consolidate existing federal programs for reducing class size and training teachers into a single fund, which would receive an additional \$400 million and be distributed to states in proportion to student population. States would spend the funds on whichever teacher quality investment was needed to fit



Gov. George W. Bush, Republican candidate for president.

dates intend to continue in this direction.

Bush would create a "reward fund" of \$500 million over 5 years for states that excel and proposes to cut federal funding of states that fail according to federal standards. He calls for states to give school-by-school report cards to the parents and the public. Bush also calls for failing schools to adopt reforms or lose Title I funding. Reform measures would include restructuring management, personnel changes, and possibly a school of choice program.

Gore proposes more funding for failing schools to overhaul the curriculum, provide professional development for teachers, and fire low-performing teachers. He would consider closing down a school and reopening it under a new principal if the school does not meet performance standards for four years. Gore also favors allowing students in failing schools to transfer to another public school and withdrawing a portion of funding from states that fail to improve student scores.

On standards, Bush wants all states to use the National Assessment of Educational Progress Test in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. He calls for all states to develop their own standardized tests for assessing student achievement in math and reading in grades 3-8.

Gore wants national tests for fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math to be voluntary, but wants national reading

their particular situation, such as hiring more new teachers or improving professionalism of the existing teachers.

Bush also calls for a \$400 tax deduction to cover out-of-pocket teacher expenses. "Teachers are not the object of education. They are the engine of education reform. They have a high calling, and we must respect it," he told an audience in Milwaukee in March.

Gore would require states to ensure all teachers obtain credentials by 2004 or lose federal funding. He also proposes an \$8 billion incentive program, which would give all teachers a \$5,000 pay raise if their communities adopted tougher teacher standards. Beyond that he would give "master teachers" an additional \$5,000.

"We should pay teachers better. Many of our teachers do not get the support they need, and most accomplished teachers do not get the rewards they deserve," says the Gore Web site.

For more information, visit the candidates' Web sites at [www.algore2000.com](http://www.algore2000.com) and [www.georgewbush.com](http://www.georgewbush.com). An independent Web site, [www.issues2000.com](http://www.issues2000.com), provides summaries of all presidential candidates' policies.

### School choice

School choice—reducing the political and financial barriers that prevent parents from choosing the best and safest schools for their children—may be the most divisive issue in the education debate. Advocates include many black parents with children in failing inner-city schools, religious groups, and proponents of greater parental freedom in education. Opponents include some civil rights groups, education employee unions, and other public school organizations.

Bush proposes a plan to allow children in failing schools to leave after three years with a \$1,500 federal voucher to help them pay for enrollment in a new public or a nonpublic school, or for educational aids.

"In the worst case, we will offer schol-

grants of \$1,000 to students who pass either Advanced Placement or college math and science courses while in high school. He would set aside \$1 billion over 5 years to fund collaborations between colleges and states in math and science. He also favors having students tested in math every year in grades 3-8 and raising the maximum student loan forgiveness from \$5,000 to \$17,000 for those students graduating in engineering, technology, math, and science.

Gore calls for funding one million new teachers over the next 10 years, with emphasis on areas such as math and science. He would forgive loans for 300,000 students who agree to teach math and science in "high-need" schools and other scarce subject areas. He also wants national math standards to be established for grades 4, 8, and 12.

## Diverse Viewpoints

# Will vouchers encourage the creation of radical schools?

*With vouchers, there is nothing to prohibit such schools from opening*

Recently I read about a 1995 federal court case that addresses one part of the question of what happens when public funds are translated into support for private schools through vouchers. An African-American student attending a private high school in Milwaukee—University School—gave a speech on black separatism in her English class. The student criticized the school as racist and the school responded by suspending her and asking her not to return the following year. She sued the school claiming she was being punished for statements constitutionally protected as free speech. She lost the case.

In the decision, federal Judge Terrence Evans wrote, "It is an elementary principle of constitutional law that the protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private actors such as the University School. Generally, restrictions on constitutional rights that would be protected at a public high school . . . need not be honored at a private high school."

That's an impressive finding from a federal court in the context of trying to determine the impact of vouchers. Directly, then, the message is that even in a circumstance where private schools are funded by publicly financed vouchers—as many are under Milwaukee's voucher system—the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights do not apply to the private school students. This is all the more impressive when you recognize it is possible for the total budget of a private school to be funded with publicly financed vouchers.

There is nothing to prohibit the development of private Klu Klux Klan schools. There is nothing to prohibit the development of private sectarian religious schools. There is nothing to prohibit the development of private home schools with narrowly exclusive agendas. And American history gives us examples of such private schools. Would providing public funds encourage such developments? It certainly seems likely.

So, when we acknowledge that private schools are not subject to constitutional protections, and private schools will admit and retain only those students they wish to admit and retain, and private schools don't have to meet any state achievement standards, and private schools are not required to provide any particular number of hours of teaching, and private schools do not have to report their work to the public, and private schools are governed by non-elected and publicly non-accountable boards, and private schools do not have to meet in public or make their records available to the public—we certainly have the makings of a system in which voucher dollars can be used to support "radical or fraudulent" schools. Is that a problem? Don't we want diversity?

It is a problem. Diversity which includes unconstitutional behavior—whether created for that purpose or not—is a problem in a democratic society. Unaccountability is a problem in a democratic society. If an institution is neither accountable to the Constitution nor to the public responsible for its funding, that institution easily can pursue an unrepresentative agenda, even one with values contrary to the general public and our Constitution.

It would be foolish to argue that most private schools are likely to pursue "radical" agendas. It would be foolish to argue that private schools generally are likely to deprive their students of constitutional rights. It would be equally foolish to ignore the fact that such possibilities would be enhanced through enactment of a voucher program such as the one offered to voters under November's Proposal 1.

Our commitment to public education is based on the democratic notion that kids have the greatest opportunity for development if they grow with and learn with children from different backgrounds. Deborah Meier makes a compelling statement about our common educational agenda in *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem*:

The task of creating environments where all kids can experience the power of their ideas . . . means accepting public responsibility for the shared future of the next generation. It's a task for all of us, not just the school people or policymakers or even parents alone. The stakes are enormous, and the answers within reach. . . . We're not accustomed to recognizing the power of each other's ideas; it's easier to take flight. If we abandon a system of common schools through apathy and privatization—we deprive everyone, not just the least advantaged, of the kind of clash of ideas that will make us all more powerful. More importantly, reinventing our public schools could provide an exciting opportunity to use our often forgotten power to create imaginary worlds, share theories, and act out possibilities. Schools embody the dreams we have for our children. All of them. These dreams must remain public property.

Meier is an outspoken advocate for choice *within* public education. Her insight into the power of common schools underscores the stake all of us have in the debate over the effort to underwrite private education with public dollars. A strong public education system is the basis of our democracy.

Former state representative Lynn Jondahl is executive director of the Michigan Prospect for Renewed Citizenship.



Lynn Jondahl

YES



Lori Yaklin

NO

*Parents can be trusted to make the right decisions for their children*

It is foolish to assert that "radical" schools will result from breaking down the financial barriers that today prevent low-income parents from choosing a better or safer school for their children. This notion, used by the opponents of education reform to scare people into opposing school choice, not only defies common sense and all the evidence, but also begs the question of who defines what is "radical."

The argument usually runs something like this: If parents are allowed more freedom to choose where their children go to school, what's to stop the Ku Klux Klan or a coven of witches from opening their own racist or magic schools?

The answer is: The same thing that prevents them from opening their own racist or magic schools or colleges now, which is the fact that insufficient demand exists among parents to send their children to such places. How could these schools stay in business if no one wants to attend them?

Both common sense and the evidence prove that this concern is meritless. First, in order to believe that poor and middle class parents would, given the same educational opportunities that wealthy parents now enjoy, make bad choices in number large enough to support "radical" schools, one must believe that these parents don't love or care about their children as much as wealthy parents care about theirs.

This elitist assumption is untrue. Poor parents care just as much for their children as more affluent parents, which is one reason why over 70 percent of low-income parents support expanded school choice. Unfortunately, under the current system, in which the government assigns children to schools based on where they live, these concerned parents just do not have the freedom or ability to send their children to the best and safest schools. They are trapped in a government system in which only the well-to-do can rescue their children from failing schools by either moving or paying tuition to a private school.

Furthermore, what parent, even one who holds "radical" views, is going to send his or her child to a "radical" school? Will that child get into college with a diploma from "Ku Klux Klan Academy?" Will that child get a job after listing "Militia High School" on his application? Whether by name or reputation, a "radical" school education would damage future prospects for success, even success as a "radical."

The claim that "radical" schools will proliferate also defies common-sense economics. Because of high parent demand, Michigan has 1,056 nonpublic schools that serve families from every ethnic group and socioeconomic background, and not one is a "radical" school. Such schools can survive only by satisfying enough parents to make the schools financially viable with much tighter budgets than public schools. Private schools in Michigan receive on average \$3,100 in tuition to educate a child, whereas public schools receive a minimum of \$6,600. Therefore any private school that was grossly out of the mainstream simply could not attract enough students to keep its doors open.

Evidence from real-life experience also demonstrates that the "radical" school claim is false. Many states, including Vermont, Ohio, Wisconsin, Florida, Arizona, Minnesota, and Illinois have tuition voucher or tuition tax credit plans in place, and there is no known case of a school of the type the alarmists have predicted. The same is true in higher education. For years, college students have been using vouchers in the form of Pell Grants and the G.I. Bill to attend private and public colleges—even religious seminaries—and we have yet to see

the University of the KKK or the College of Magic and Witchcraft.

Supporters of school choice should turn this argument around and ask what parents should do when they believe that their *public schools* have become radical. There have been incidents reported in other states of witches making presentations to elementary school children. In fact, in one situation parents were shocked to learn that their children had participated in an actual pagan ceremony in which they danced and chanted incantations. In our own state, many parents were concerned to learn that, without their permission or foreknowledge, homosexual activists had been brought in to explain to their children that people (e.g., parents) whose religious beliefs clash with the activists' agenda are bigots. In Massachusetts, education officials issued a public apology to parents, after parents learned that public schools and state employees had given graphic instruction in homosexual sex acts to children as young as 12. Understandably, many parents find the idea of government employees providing "how to" advice on homosexual acts to be radical.

The answer to the dilemma of defining "radical" is to trust the parents to decide the proper schooling for their children, just as we trust them to decide proper medical treatment and proper nutrition. No one loves or cares for the children as much as their parents, and it is insulting to imply that anyone else should make these decisions.

Once parents have the freedom to match their children's educational interests and needs to the offerings of a particular school of their choosing, we will begin to see lower dropout rates, higher academic achievement, satisfied parents, and happier children. And that's the real magic—the magic of school choice.

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Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of *Michigan Education Report*. Tell us what you think: "Will vouchers encourage the creation of radical schools?" Send your comments to

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