

# MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

\$3.00

News and analysis for educators, parents, and policy makers

Winter 2001

## SHORT SUBJECTS

**A severe lack of financial accountability** was revealed in a recent audit of 45 Detroit public schools. Three school employees have been charged with embezzlement, and five schools are under scrutiny after auditors found more than \$600,000 mis-spent or missing. It had been 12 years since the district conducted its last school-by-school audit. The district is now requiring school administrators to attend a basic accounting course. Audits of the rest of the district schools will continue later in the year.

**Education spending received an 8-percent boost** in the state budget passed by the Michigan Legislature in December 2000. Appropriations for K-12 public education increased to over \$10.8 billion in fiscal year 2001 and include a new \$9.6 million fund to provide rewards to elementary schools with the best or most improved test scores.

**Students from 12 countries outperformed American eighth-graders** in math and science, according to recently released findings of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study-Repeat. The full results of the study, which assessed students in 38 countries, can be accessed at <http://nces.ed.gov/timss-r/index.asp>.

**Improving K-12 schools through greater choice and competition** may be best accomplished by a "universal education credit," says a study released in December 2000 by the Washington, D.C.-based Cato Institute. The credit would provide any taxpayer with the opportunity to contribute to a child's education—public or private—and receive a dollar-for-dollar reduction in tax liability. The study can be accessed at [www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-388es.html](http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-388es.html).

**The constitutionality of vouchers is likely to be decided** this year by the U.S. Supreme Court, following a ruling by the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that Cleveland's voucher program violates the First Amendment's "establishment clause." Currently, 9,638 students attend 103 schools with the help of the city's voucher program.

## Proposal 1: Gone but not forgotten

### Voucher "threat" encourages district-wide changes

The overwhelming defeat of Proposal 1, the November 2000 school voucher initiative, does not necessarily mean the measure had no effect on Michigan's public education system.

The initiative, rejected by a 31 to 69 percent margin, nevertheless could have a lasting impact, if the reform plans of some of the state's poorest performing school districts are any indication.

Proposal 1 would have offered vouchers to students in "failing" school districts—those districts graduating less than two-thirds of their students. When the voucher campaign was launched in early 1999, 38 Michigan districts had graduation rates within the failing range. By Election Day, the number of failing districts had dwindled to only seven.

Few, if any, school reform initiatives—even those that have been enacted—could claim such astonishing impact. And Proposal 1's influence is being felt in other ways.

The seven districts that posted graduation rates of 60 percent or higher in 2000 were:

RESPONSE continued on page 2



Though defeated, Proposal 1 has prompted reform in many school districts, including Saginaw's Buena Vista schools, which posted a dismal 51.7 graduation rate in the 1998-99 school year.

## Teacher's lawsuit overturns MEA policy

### Union cannot restrict members' right to resign

Teachers and other public school employees who want to resign from the state's largest public school employee union can now do so outside the union's established resignation period, according to a recent ruling by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC).

The commission, which adjudicates disputes among public employees, their unions, and employers, found in December 2000 that West Branch High School teacher Frank Dame had been unlawfully denied his right to resign from the Michigan Education Association (MEA) and its local affiliate, the West Branch/Rose City Education Association.

"This is a victory for all public school teachers in Michigan," says Dame's volunteer legal consultant Robert Hunter of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. "The MEA must now respect the rights of teachers who wish to resign from the union at the time a resignation request is made."

On April 8, 1998, Dame sent a letter to his local union president, terminating his membership and objecting to the union collection and expenditure of any fee other than Dame's "share of the union's costs of collective bargaining, contract administration

LAWSUIT continued on page 8

## Education prominent in elections

### Initiatives across the country put to vote

Education was a hot issue on ballots and in races across the country this election year. Debates over school choice, bilingual education, college education savings programs, and school funding were waged among candidates and voters alike. Following is a recap of the issues that faced voters in Michigan and across the country.

#### Proposal 1

Michigan's Proposal 1, a school voucher plan, was soundly defeated Nov. 7 by a margin of 69 to 31 percent. The proposal would have provided for teacher testing, guaranteed per-pupil funding for public schools, and vouchers to students in failing school districts.

A district was deemed to be "failing" if it graduated less than two-thirds of its students. Seven districts would have qualified for the voucher program if the proposal had passed. Proponents, led by the Kids First! Yes! organization, included the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Catholic Conference.

The opposition campaign, All Kids First!, was supported financially and politically by the Michigan Education Association, along with its parent organization, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers. The unions raised millions of dollars from an increase in member dues, earmarked for defeating the Michigan ballot proposal and a similar voucher proposal in California. Controversy arose over school districts spending school funds to oppose the plan.

Both supporters and opponents of Proposal 1 launched TV and radio ad campaigns and spent months debating the issue in forums and events held around the state.

Although the proposal failed, over 1.2 million Michigan citizens supported the measure, voicing a clear concern over the state of education in Michigan. Supporters of Proposal 1 say its defeat is not the end of the school choice movement. Education reform advocates are considering future ballot proposals or legislative action to increase choice, which may include increasing the current legislative cap on charter schools.

The Michigan Education Association is attempting to enlist the support of school choice forces for reforms such as class-size reduction, teacher training, and early child-

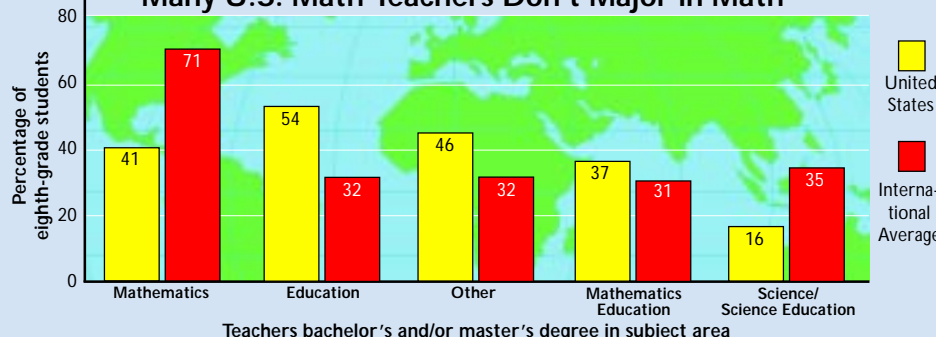
ELECTION RECAP continued on page 11

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Fenton, MI  
Permit #1776

Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
140 West Main Street  
P.O. Box 568  
Midland, Michigan 48640

### Education at a Glance

#### Many U.S. Math Teachers Don't Major in Math



According to the Third International Mathematics and Science Study-Repeat (1999), U.S. eighth-grade students were less likely than their international peers to be taught mathematics by teachers with a major or main area of study in mathematics. NOTE: More than one category could be selected.

Source: Highlights from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study-Repeat (National Center for Education Statistics 2001-027), December 2000.

# Response

continued from page 1

tion rates below two-thirds endured a rash of negative press in the months leading up to Election Day. Many of these districts have taken the criticism seriously and are enacting reforms to improve their schools and increase graduation rates in years to come.

"You can't give all the credit for reform to Proposal 1, but it certainly put public schools on notice that many parents are dissatisfied and expect districts to do better," says Matthew Brouillette, director of education policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

Some school officials contacted by Michigan Education Report disputed the accuracy of the graduation rates attributed to their districts. And total credit for the following reforms cannot unequivocally be claimed for the influence of Proposal 1. However, many officials said that the possibility of competition from a full-fledged, statewide school choice program gave them a time-sensitive incentive that would not have been present without Proposal 1.

One school district on the failing list was Inkster, in suburban Detroit. By the end of 1999, Inkster was under tremendous pressure. First, it was under threat of a state takeover, because of dismal performance and a \$1.9 million budget deficit. But Proposal 1's popularity in opinion polls at the time made it seem as if a statewide school choice plan could well be enacted by the end of the following year, expanding competition that was already luring students from the district.

Consequently, the school board became willing, for the first time, to consider a new approach to its problems: contracting the daily operation of Inkster schools to Edison Schools Inc., in the hope that Edison could turn things around. Edison is the nation's largest for-profit manager of schools and school districts. It currently manages over 113 schools nationwide, including 20 in Michigan.

The Inkster school board voted to contract with Edison in February 2000. By September, Edison had everything in place to mark the beginning of its first year of managing an entire school district. Inkster Superintendent Terry Ann Boguth is optimistic that this unprecedented reform effort will produce positive results.

Her faith is not unfounded. When

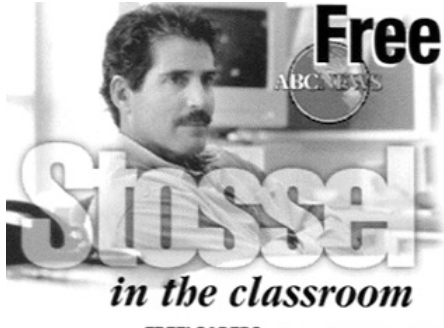
news of the Edison deal spread, Inkster's enrollment increased for the first time in 10 years. Edison is instituting assessment tests to gauge student performance and is busy determining which subject areas need the most work. The district now requires parents, students, and teachers to agree to quarterly "learning contracts." The contracts define each person's responsibilities in the educational process and allow students to have personalized education plans that focus on individual areas of greatest need. The learning contracts will work in conjunction with narrative report cards, allowing teachers to provide ongoing input on a student's progress rather than just a letter grade.

The district also plans to provide students in third grade and above with a home computer, to allow access to homework on the Internet, and to encourage parents to maintain constant contact with teachers via e-mail. Changes also are being made in Inkster's curriculum. Officials plan to focus on improving reading skills and incorporating foreign languages into elementary education. More extracurricular activities are being offered to high school students. Laptop computers and professional development programs are being provided for teachers.

Meanwhile, new Holton Public Schools Superintendent Mike Estes disputes whether his district, located in Muskegon County, actually failed to graduate two-thirds of its students, as certified by the state government in 1999. Still, he admits the district has a problem with dropouts. It has formed a task force of community members, business leaders, and parents to offer solutions.

"Nothing is accomplished if it's only done with administrators. We must meet with teachers and the community," Estes says.

The Holton district plans to create a new alternative education program that will cater to students who are not being served by traditional teaching methods. Estes also suggests that the district's curriculum could use some revision. But he is confident his district is headed in the right direction. "I wish those who were so quick to criticize us were just as quick to work with us," he told Michigan Education Report.



**Free markets work!**  
...so explains ABC News Correspondent John Stossel in his specials "Freeloaders," "Greed," and "Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?"

**These aren't just videos!** Each unit contains the ABC NEWS TV SPECIAL (presented in three segments), a Teacher's Guide, and a Student Study Guide, which can be easily photocopied.

**FREELoadERS**  
Was \$135 - Now \$90  
In many cities you see people asking for spare change. Are these people freeloaders? What about those who use the power of the government to freeloader?

**ARE WE SCARING OURSELVES TO DEATH?**  
Was \$135 - Now \$90  
What do you fear? Crime? Terrorism? There are real risks to worry about; but we, for the most part, are worrying about the wrong ones.

**GREED** Was \$135  
The rich are getting richer. Is there anything wrong with that? According to Stossel, greed is "wanting too much, wretched excess." But, consider where we would be without it.

**GREED Introductory Special!**  
**\$35**

**Order all three kits for only \$200!**

<p><b>The Palmer R. Chitester Fund</b> Stossel in the classroom 9008 Main Place, Suite 3 McKean, PA 16426</p> <p>Order Toll-Free Phone: 1-888-242-0563 FAX: 1-814-476-1283</p> <p>Order Online Web: www.prcfund.org E-mail: info@prcfund.org</p> <p>Date of Order _____</p> <p>Person ordering _____</p> <p>Title _____</p> <p>Organization _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____</p> <p>Telephone _____ E-mail _____</p>	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">GREED Kits @ \$35 ea. = \$ _____</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Sub Total \$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SCARING Kits @ \$90 ea. = \$ _____</td> <td>Shipping \$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>FREELoadERS Kits @ \$90 ea. = \$ _____</td> <td>TOTAL \$ _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>All three kits @ \$200 ea. = \$ _____</b></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p style="font-size: small;">Shipping: One unit \$6.00 Two units \$7.50 Three units \$9.00</p>	GREED Kits @ \$35 ea. = \$ _____	Sub Total \$ _____	SCARING Kits @ \$90 ea. = \$ _____	Shipping \$ _____	FREELoadERS Kits @ \$90 ea. = \$ _____	TOTAL \$ _____	<b>All three kits @ \$200 ea. = \$ _____</b>	
GREED Kits @ \$35 ea. = \$ _____	Sub Total \$ _____								
SCARING Kits @ \$90 ea. = \$ _____	Shipping \$ _____								
FREELoadERS Kits @ \$90 ea. = \$ _____	TOTAL \$ _____								
<b>All three kits @ \$200 ea. = \$ _____</b>									

PAYMENT OPTIONS

Bill my school/organization  
P.O. # \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed check/money order

Visa # \_\_\_\_\_

Master Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Buena Vista Schools in Saginaw County is another district that has undergone much upheaval in the last year. With a new interim superintendent and a vocal community, the district is working hard to respond to community concerns over the district's performance. The district reported a graduation rate of only 51.7 percent in the 1998-1999 school year. Although Londia Langston, associate superintendent, does not have an explanation for the low graduation rates, she does say that the district is making a concerted effort to reform.

Some of the district's reforms include after-school and Saturday programs for struggling students, "school improvement teams" in each school building, analysis of Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test scores to determine areas of greatest need for improvement, and, perhaps the most notable reform, surveying parents for improvement suggestions. Also, like Inkster, the district is attempting to increase retention rates in high school by instituting more extracurricular activities.

Ellen Bonter, superintendent of Vanderbilt Area Schools in Otsego County, says her district is working to find out where its dropouts have gone and why they left. In small districts—Vanderbilt has 310 students with roughly 30 high school graduates per year—not many students need fail to graduate to register a huge drop. In Vanderbilt's case, the graduation rate dropped suddenly from 100 percent in 1997-98 to 61 percent in 1998-99. Although Vanderbilt does not have an alternative education program for at-risk students, the district is looking at ways to discourage students from dropping out.

"We don't have the resources for alternative education programs, but we're working with other districts to provide alternative options, and we're also establishing dual enrollment options to encourage kids to remain in school," Bonter explains. Dual enrollment would allow students to concurrently take college course offerings while still in high school.

The district also hopes to provide college course options to its students via online university classes and a local university center. In addition, Vanderbilt's school improvement team is looking at ways to improve curriculum, increase MEAP scores, and expand course offerings within the district.

Bonter considers Vanderbilt's "active technology initiative" to be one of the

district's most ambitious plans. The district plans to provide all students in grade six and above with laptops and access to the Internet from home. Like Inkster, Vanderbilt hopes to connect parents and students to the school via computers and the Internet. Bonter hopes this initiative will also help Vanderbilt reach out to home schoolers who may have left the district's schools.

Detroit also is making changes. In the last two years, 18,000 students have left the state's largest school district to attend private, charter, or public institutions in the suburbs. New Detroit public schools CEO Kenneth Burnley is instituting a long list of reforms to improve education in the district.

Shortly after assuming the CEO post in July of this year, Burnley hired 24 "directors of accountability for student achievement" to mentor and supervise the district's principals. Since that time, the district has begun "district assessment tests," to help teachers gauge student progress throughout the year. These tests have been deemed "mini-MEAPs" by Burnley, due to their similarity to the statewide achievement test. Eventually, Detroit's mini-MEAPs will be given to students in all grades, several times a year.

Burnley plans to institute preschool and full-day kindergarten in schools across the district, renovate dilapidated buildings and classrooms, provide Internet access in every classroom, and increase parental involvement. He hopes to increase funding for the district by creating a development team to raise money from corporate and private donors. He also has overseen numerous privatization efforts, which are expected to save the district millions of dollars in coming years. The district is even considering hiring Edison to run 40 or more of its worst-performing schools.

"It's hard to argue that charter schools and other forms of choice have not had a positive impact on public schools," says Brouillette. "To the extent Proposal 1's promise to expand choice helped more schools improve, that's a good thing."

STOP

Don't Lose Your FREE Subscription!

We must hear from you! If we don't, you will miss Michigan's largest and most balanced source of education-related news and analysis. Let us know you still want Michigan Education Report by mailing, faxing, or e-mailing us today!

If we have already heard from you, there is no need to respond again.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Michigan Education Report • 140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568 • Midland, Michigan 48640  
(517) 631-0900 • Fax (517) 631-0964 • www.EducationReport.org • MER@EducationReport.org

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

Published by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
Matthew J. Brouillette Elizabeth H. Moser  
Executive Editor News and Feature Editor

David M. Bardallis Daniel E. Montgomery Amy Kellogg  
Editor Graphic Designer Circulation Manager

Michigan Education Report is a news and analysis quarterly published by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, research and educational institute devoted to analyzing Michigan public policy issues. Michigan Education Report is received by over 130,000 Michigan teachers, administrators, school board members, policy experts, and elected officials. Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved. Permission to reprint any article contained herein is hereby granted provided that Michigan Education Report, the author, and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy are properly cited, and a copy of the reprint is sent to the editor. Please contact the editor at

Michigan Education Report • 140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568  
Midland, Michigan 48640  
(517) 631-0900 • Fax (517) 631-0964  
www.EducationReport.org • MER@EducationReport.org

# Michigan ranks third in U.S. Ritalin use

*Critics question effectiveness, appropriateness of drug*

Some parents call it the miracle medication. Growing numbers of teachers swear by it. So perhaps it is no wonder that the drug Ritalin has become the most common treatment for Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

For decades, experts and schools have encouraged Ritalin use as necessary for children who otherwise would not succeed in school or possibly even in life because of

The American Psychiatric Association has published diagnostic criteria for ADHD. The criteria break ADHD down to the most common behaviors present in people with the disorder and then group these into 3 symptom clusters: hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention.

Many schools have come to rely on checklists of these symptoms to identify children with ADHD. Serious problems can arise when people move from listing symptoms to making a diagnosis. Due to the vagueness of these symptoms and their common presence in the normal behavior of children, accurate diagnosis is a difficult task requiring professional evaluation.

David Gaffney, a social worker in Saginaw who specializes in ADHD treatment, says that, "ADHD is not actually a disorder but rather is a series of symptoms. There are many conditions—both medical and psychiatric—which can produce those symptoms. Actually, there are many different ADHD conditions, depending on the underlying cause."

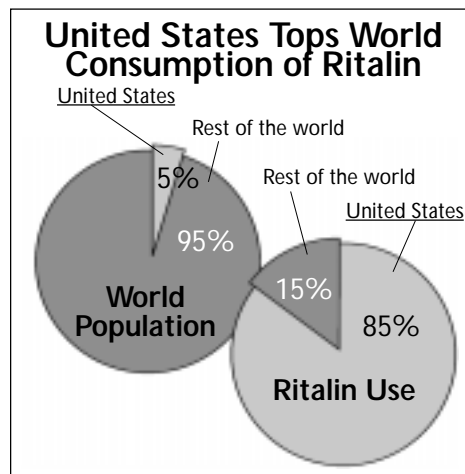
"A proper diagnosis requires time and a careful examination of many factors," adds Gaffney. "A checklist of symptoms can be more misleading to a nonprofessional than helpful: It can lead many children to be improperly diagnosed."

The American Academy of Pediatrics agrees, and in May 2000 released a meticulous 13-page set of guidelines for pediatricians to use in evaluating children suspected of having ADHD. This resulted from growing concern that ADHD is being overdiagnosed and Ritalin and other drugs overprescribed.

But what concerns an increasing number of physicians is not so much the diagnosis as the treatment. Since the 1950s, Ritalin—a powerful stimulant that "shares many of the pharmacological effects of amphetamine, methamphetamine, and cocaine," according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency—has been increasingly used in controlling ADHD symptoms and children's behavior.

While Ritalin definitely decreases hyperactivity and quiets the child, recent studies have cast doubt upon whether it aids learning, as the drug's advocates claim. The most vociferous critics, such as Dr. Peter Breggin, author of "Talking Back to Ritalin: What Doctors Aren't Telling You About Stimulants for Children," say Ritalin isn't for the child at all. It's for the teacher.

Prescriptions for Ritalin nationwide expanded 150 percent in the 1990s. By 1998, Michigan ranked third in the nation in Ritalin use. But a massive increase in the use of a serious drug would seem to indicate a massive outbreak of a serious malady,



The United States, with less than 5 percent of the world's population, accounts for 85 percent of the world's consumption of Ritalin.

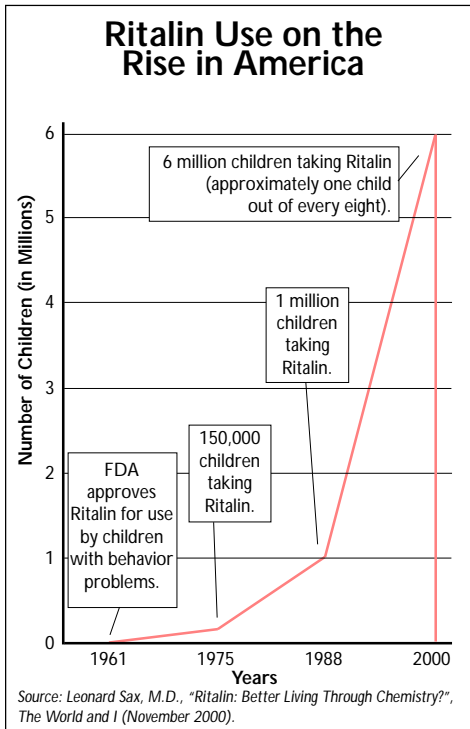
Source: Leonard Sax, M.D., "Ritalin: Better Living Through Chemistry?", *The World and I* (November 2000).

ADHD. Why, critics wonder, would the United States experience such an epidemic and not, say, Europe? Why would a serious disease strike only American school children?

Yet, there can be no doubt that a massive education effort during the past decade, aimed at teachers and other school administrators, and the medical community has tracked with the massive increase in Ritalin use in the United States. Many pediatricians receive their education about treatment options from drug representatives and materials prepared by drug companies. Some critics charge that this leaves doctors predisposed to considering medication over other options.

Efforts by managed care companies to continue cutting the costs of health care are also a factor in Ritalin's popularity. Choosing a lifetime of medication for a patient can seem initially cheaper than paying for an extended course of psychotherapy. In the past year, a major national HMO operating in Michigan made a decision to no longer approve therapy for ADHD, declaring the treatment of choice to be medication.

These trends are in spite of research that shows significant support for the efficacy of therapy as compared to medication. In December 1999, a major study was published



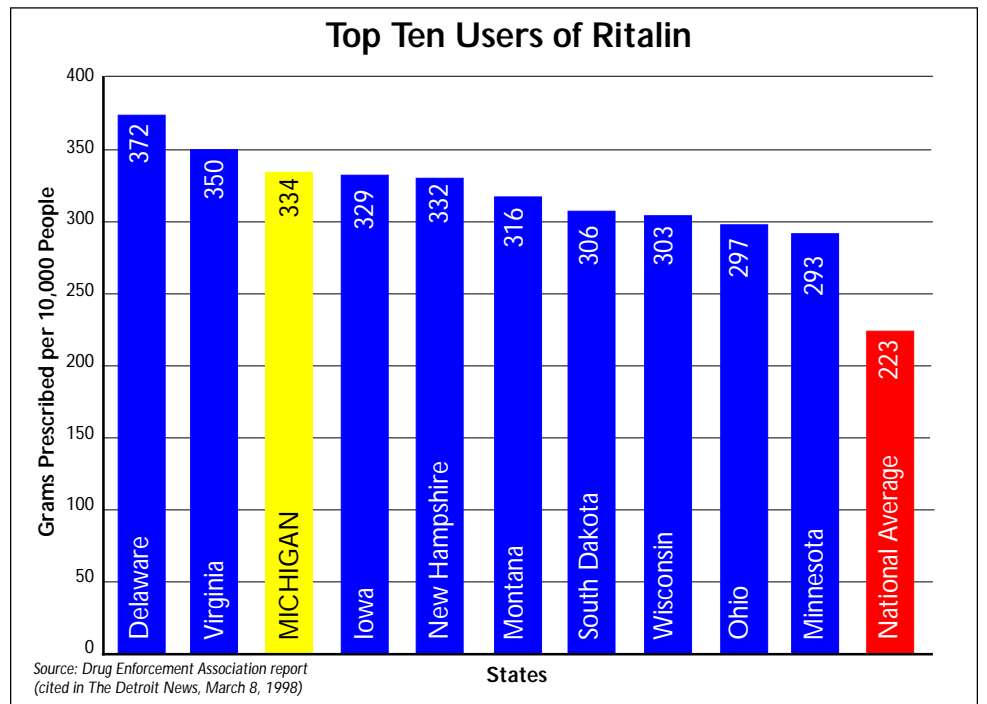
Source: Leonard Sax, M.D., "Ritalin: Better Living Through Chemistry?", *The World and I* (November 2000).

their disorder. Yet many parents and advocacy groups are increasingly alarmed that there may be a dark side to this "miracle."

With growing controversy over marketing techniques, inappropriate prescriptions, and conflicting research findings, many experts are beginning to worry that the "cure" might be worse than the problem. Increasingly, psychotherapy experts and school reform leaders are calling for a re-examination of how schools rely on Ritalin to manage behavior in the classroom instead of addressing and resolving the underlying problems of students.

ADHD is a psychiatric diagnosis given by many doctors when a child or adult displays difficulty concentrating, paying attention, sitting still, or delaying gratification.

But because most people struggle with these issues from time to time, and because behavioral experts claim that anywhere from 3 to 10 percent of all children display symptoms sufficient to be diagnosed with ADHD, some have worried that the diagnosis itself simply describes the outer edge of normal behavior.



Source: Drug Enforcement Association report (cited in *The Detroit News*, March 8, 1998)

One explanation has been put forward in class-action lawsuits filed in Texas, California, and New Jersey. The suits charge that Novartis, the pharmaceutical company that manufactures Ritalin, "colluded to create, develop and promote the diagnosis of... (ADHD) in a highly successful effort to increase the market for its product Ritalin." The charge is denied by the defendants, which include also the American Psychiatric Association and Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

in the Archives of General Psychiatry that found Ritalin alone is not an effective treatment for ADHD on two measures which directly concern a child's success in school: academic skills and social functioning. Academic and social skills were found to improve only when Ritalin was combined with behavioral treatment in the home and/or at school.

This matched the findings of the major research review released by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 1998, which

RITALIN continued on page 8

# Charter schools get good marks

*Research shows positive effects on students, other schools*

Five years of studies on charter schools throughout Michigan and the United States show that charters are meeting the needs of traditionally underserved children and forcing traditional public schools to change for the better, according to a November 2000 report released by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Education Reform (CER).

The CER report analyzed the existing body of research on charter schools and identified 53 research-based and predominantly objective studies to incorporate into a comprehensive picture of how charter schools are serving students. Included in the analysis were numerous studies on Michigan's charter schools.

The CER report found that the popularity of charter schools remains high. U.S. Department of Education studies profiled in the report show 7 out of 10 U.S. charter schools have long waiting lists.

In 1992, only one charter school existed in the entire country. Today, more than 2,000 charters dot the nation's landscape. In Michigan, the number of charters stood at 14 in 1994; currently, there are 184 charter schools throughout the state, serving approximately 58,000 students.

Michigan's charters, also called "public school academies" or PSAs, can be authorized by state universities, community colleges, intermediate school districts, or local school districts. Although Michigan's law has stifled the growth of charter schools by only allowing 150 to be authorized by state universities, a number of school districts have chosen to authorize additional charters.

The CER report cites many studies that show competition from charter schools has encouraged public schools to improve and offer additional programs. Recent research by Lansing-based Public Sector Consultants

(PSC) confirms this to be true in Michigan. According to PSC's web site, [www.publicsectorconsultants.com](http://www.publicsectorconsultants.com), PSAs make traditional public schools "likely to add specific features that... neighboring PSAs offer (such as all-day kindergarten, before- and after-school programs, and emphasis on character education)."

A study by Western Michigan University (WMU) also highlights many ways in which Michigan's charters have spurred improvement in public schools. The WMU study finds that charters encourage public schools to be more responsive to parents, to establish additional programs, to create options that better fit students' needs, and to achieve consensus between teachers, parents, administrators, and others as to what the school is trying to achieve.

While many of the studies' findings are positive, Michigan Educational Assessment

Program (MEAP) scores cited in the PSC and WMU studies have raised doubts about student academic achievement in charter schools. These studies, along with the CER report, cite many instances where charter school test scores are lower than scores in public schools in the same districts.

Yet, the CER study says it is difficult to track student achievement in charters by simply comparing achievement test scores to those of the public schools in the same district, given the short period of time charters have been in existence and the dynamic nature of schools themselves. As more charters open across the country and existing charters add grades to meet increased demand, achievement test results incorporate different groups of students each year, making it difficult to track ongoing progress.

Another factor that often skews achievement... CHARTER SCHOOLS continued on page 4

**LEGISLATIVE ACTION**

**Character education bill on hold**

In an effort to address behavior problems, Michigan lawmakers are considering a bill that would require character education in all schools.

Rep. Valde Garcia, R-St. Johns, sponsored the legislation that would require school districts to include a character development program in their curriculum for grades K-12 starting in the 2001-02 school year.

The bill calls for the program to stress qualities such as attentiveness, patience, and initiative. The State Board of Education would be required to develop a secular model program school districts could adopt. The program would be similar to the national character education programs, Character Counts! and Character First!, which were profiled in the fall 2000 issue of Michigan Education Report.

The House Education Committee discussed the bill in December but took no action.

**Education savings program launched**

The Michigan Education Savings Program, a plan offering parents and others the chance to invest tax-free in any child's higher education, was officially launched in late November 2000.

"A good education is the cornerstone of opportunity and these accounts will give more families the ability to achieve their educational goals," state Sen. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton, said at the Nov. 21 press conference unveiling the college savings program. Rogers sponsored the legislation establishing the accounts. The bill was passed by the Legislature in May and signed by Gov. Engler in June.

Under the plan, a parent, grandparent, or others can open an account for a student by investing as little as \$25. An individual can place as much as \$5,000 annually into an account and not pay the state's 4.2-percent income tax. Joint filers could invest up to \$10,000 without paying state taxes on the principal or subsequent interest earned. Those who set up an account by Dec. 31, 2000, could take advantage of the tax break on their taxes.

**Legislature fails to increase charter cap**

Despite Gov. Engler's support for the idea, the Legislature failed to increase the statutory cap on university-authorized charter schools in 2000. The proposed bill would have allowed a gradual increase of the cap on university-sponsored charters by 25 per year, up to 225 in 2002. The current cap, set at 150, has been reached, and many students remain on waiting lists to attend charter schools across the state.

Under current law, universities, intermediate and local school districts, and community colleges are the only entities that can create charters. Universities authorize the most charters, while intermediate and local school districts only charter a small percentage of schools.

Many legislators say they may support a bill if it includes provisions for more government regulation of charters.

**House advances speech instructor bill**

The Michigan House adopted a measure in December 2000 to permit school

districts to employ speech and language pathologists who are not certified as teachers. All pathologists must still meet the requirements for speech language certification by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

Supporters of the measure argue school districts are experiencing teacher shortages, including a shortage of speech and language therapists and pathologists. According to the State Department of Education, 35 intermediate school districts have requested waivers to the administrative rules that require these personnel to hold a teaching certificate.

Opponents of the measure argue that a shortage of pathologists does not justify "lowering the standards" in the teaching profession.

Proponents of the bill counter that teaching certification has little impact on the tasks of speech therapists and pathologists. They also argue that teacher certification does not guarantee competency.

The bill would not allow speech and language pathologists to serve as classroom teachers.

**Charter Schools**

*continued from page 3*

ment test results is the fact that, contrary to the expectations of charter school critics, students who transfer to charters are often the students who are struggling in public schools—not the high achievers—meaning their test scores will, on average, be lower than the averages at traditional schools.

Studies also show charters are serving an ethnically diverse array of students and appealing to students through innovative programs and services. CER's report profiles numerous studies that show charters across the country serve more low-income and minority students than do traditional public schools. Also, studies show many

charters cater to "at-risk" students—providing another option for students who may otherwise drop out of school and a second chance for students who are expelled or suspended from public schools.

One area where charters may be lacking is special education. Charters have far fewer special education students than public schools, usually due to the lack of resources to provide for severely disabled children. However, many charter students with learning disabilities are placed in mainstream classrooms with great success. And there are a few charter schools in Michigan that cater especially to students with learning disabilities.

What is the bottom line? Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies says the studies confirm his belief that charters are making a difference for students who have not been served by traditional schools.

"Charter schools are the first education reform in decades to succeed," Quisenberry says. "Anyone seeking the story behind the numbers—looking inside Michigan's charter schools—is going to find tremendous proof of children learning more, better, faster."

For more information on the CER report, see the Center's web site at <http://edreform.com/pubs/charters.htm>.

**CLEANING... FOR KIDS**

We're dedicated to maintaining a healthy academic environment for students. Allow us to design a housekeeping program specifically for your school.

One call to Educlean Services brings over 150 combined years of cleaning experience to your management team.


We're nearby and hands-on...chances are that our regional offices are located just a short drive from your facility.



Flint • Detroit • Ann Arbor • Kalamazoo • Battle Creek • Grand Rapids  
Saginaw • Lansing • Bay City • Marquette • Traverse City • Midland • Holland

**800-632-1221**

**Teachers...**



**Lessons from the Great Depression.**

Free instructional materials available online, or purchase a booklet for only \$1. Bulk discounts available.

Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568  
Midland, Michigan 48640  
(517) 631-0900 • Fax (517) 631-0964  
[mcpp@mackinac.org](mailto:mcpp@mackinac.org)

**KEEP YOUR FREE SUBSCRIPTION!**

E-mail your name and address to [MER@EducationReport.org](mailto:MER@EducationReport.org). (Or see page 2 for postal address and fax number.)

**WORLD&I**

Bring a **World of Ideas** and the **Ideas of the World** Into Your Classroom!

**EXPLORE THE WORLD & I EDUCATION PROGRAM!**


THE ULTIMATE RESOURCE

Each 350-page monthly issue of The World & I and its accompanying Teacher's Guide bring leading experts and scholars into your school for a spirited debate of current events. You'll motivate and enrich students with over 40 relevant and compelling articles on cutting-edge developments in world affairs, science and technology, cultural and geographical studies, philosophy, and the arts, and more.

FREE ACCESS TO ON-LINE ARCHIVES

Gain access to five years' worth of articles in our on-line database at [www.worldandi.com](http://www.worldandi.com) with your print subscription. Find an article to support your lesson plan anytime, day or night, with this quick and effective on-line resource.


Call 1-800-822-2822 for your risk-free trial issue or order on-line at [www.worldandi.com](http://www.worldandi.com)!



**TRIAL ISSUE**

W12861

**MER**  
Online Edition



Search. Read. Print.  
Every issue. Every word. All the time.

[www.EducationReport.org](http://www.EducationReport.org)

# Company celebrates 25 years of helping at-risk students

*Private firm serves over 5,000 troubled youths nationwide*

James Boyle wanted to help educate troubled students who were struggling in the traditional classroom setting. So when a Chicago-area high school asked the former public school teacher and principal to set up a program that would deal with the high number of expulsions the district was experiencing, Boyle jumped at the chance.

Over 25 years later, Boyle's modest be-

no sense," Boyle explains. "A student should not be taking algebra unless he has demonstrated a mastery of arithmetic concepts. We set out to put mastery ahead of advancement. It worked with that first class of 25 students and we've kept our focus ever since."

Once word got around that Ombudsman was "turning drop-outs into graduates," other school districts began referring stu-



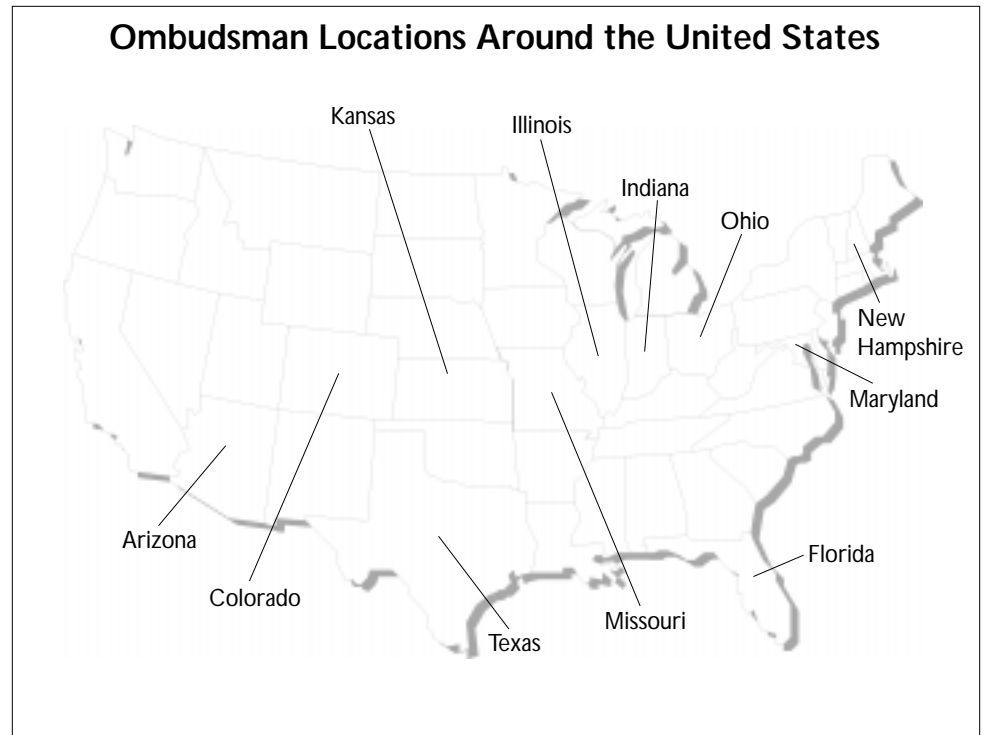
ginning with 25 students in a refurbished gas station has blossomed into Ombudsman Educational Services, one of the nation's largest private providers of alternative education under contract with public schools. Ombudsman now serves over 5,000 students annually in over 70 centers throughout the United States.

Boyle realized in 1975, when he co-founded Ombudsman with fellow teacher Lori Sweeney, that traditional education was not working for many students. He and his colleagues sought a way to provide alternative education to those who had either dropped out of school or were at risk of dropping out or being expelled. His first class of students had flunked eighth grade, but had been promoted to high school anyway.

"For them, traditional education made

dents to the program. Within three years, Ombudsman had five centers serving over 20 districts. Ombudsman does not advertise, but, to this day, its programs continue to attract more students and more school districts looking for a solution, or alternative, for students who are not served by traditional schooling.

Ombudsman averages an 85-percent student retention rate. The program seeks to increase student achievement enough to enable students to return to their traditional school prepared to graduate, or graduate directly from Ombudsman. The approach involves self-paced instruction with low pupil-teacher ratios. Students attend the program for three (sometimes four, depending on the site) hours a day, five days a week, and work at their own pace with computer-based instruction in basic skills.



Says one Ombudsman student about the program, "I learned more in these four hours than I learned in a week at my old school. You learn about three or four subjects a day and spend about 45 minutes on each subject, so it's like a classroom . . . By the end of the day, you're tired."

Another student notes, "They do tests so you start with what you don't know and you don't redo the things you already know. You don't get bored. You go at your own pace."

Ombudsman's per-pupil costs are low, about half the cost of educating a student in a regular public school. The teachers are

state-certified and most programs are accredited by the North Central Association.

Robert Hansen, assistant superintendent of an Illinois school district that contracts with Ombudsman, explained, "Ombudsman has provided an alternative education for many students in District 300. This alternative has provided them an opportunity to receive their diploma when they felt it was an impossible achievement."

# District sues state over public school choice program

*Mackinac Center offers to help Westwood stem exodus of students*

Michigan's "schools-of-choice" program is causing a racial re-segregation of public schools, a school district is charging in a lawsuit filed against the state in October 2000.

In the legal action, the Westwood Community School District in Dearborn Heights claims to have lost approximately 150 students and more than \$1 million in funding since 1996 due to the schools-of-choice law, which allows students to attend charter schools or public schools outside their own school districts. Funding follows the students to the schools of their choice.

The lawsuit claims that 98 percent of those who have left Westwood are white, upsetting the 2,200-student district's 50-50 balance of white and black students. In four years, the district's balance has become 58 percent black and 42 percent white plus other ethnic groups, Daniel Ferrera, the school district's attorney, told *The Detroit News*. But not everyone agrees that school choice is the problem.

"The district has this exactly backwards," says Joseph Overton, senior vice president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. "What encourages racial polarization by neighborhood is when parents can only send their children to the neighborhood public school. If parents become dissatisfied with that school, their only choices are to live with it, or, if they have the financial means to do so, move to a neighborhood with better schools. This is a huge reason behind the segregation of so many of America's neighborhoods, since minority families are often on the lower end of the economic scale and can't move. The children in these families are left behind in

poor schools. In the schools-of-choice program, parents can continue to live in a district, even though their children may attend school elsewhere. This means they don't have to move. If we erect barriers that pre-

vented that instead of using the force of law to retain children and families, the district should survey parents to find out why they are putting their children in other schools. Then the district should take steps to im-

choice is causing an exodus of white students from public schools. The *News* reviewed enrollment numbers in districts around Detroit, finding that schools-of-choice districts are becoming more racially diverse, not less.

The survey shows that of the 13,793 students enrolled in 44 Wayne County charter schools in 1998, 10,950, or about 80 percent, were black. Of the 4,922 students enrolled in 13 Oakland County charters in 1999, 3,748, or 76 percent, were black. In other words, black students are taking advantage of the schools-of-choice program as much or more than white students in these districts.

"This public school district needs an attitude change," says Overton. "Instead of viewing choice as the problem, administrators need to view parents and teachers as customers. The focus should be on improving the schools to earn parental support, not erecting a political razor-wire fence to stop children from escaping."

An Oct. 29 *Detroit News* editorial urged Westwood officials to meet with the Mackinac Center. Westwood School Board President Sandra Rich replied that the board would "certainly have a discussion over this" and added that the district is "always looking for ways to improve." The editorial did not state what the district is doing to determine why students had left or what might convince them to return.

Although the Westwood District acknowledged receipt of the Mackinac Center's letter, it to date has not sought the nonprofit organization's assistance.



Westwood Community School District—which covers parts of Inkster, Dearborn Heights, and Dearborn—has not remained competitive with neighboring districts. Since 1996, over 150 students have left Westwood for other schools.

vent parental choice, parents will continue to move out of the district, leaving both the schools and the community more segregated."

In an Oct. 20 letter to Westwood officials, the nonprofit Mackinac Center offered to manage the district and stop the exodus of students by improving the quality of education. The letter, drafted by Overton, sug-

gested that instead of using the force of law to retain children and families, the district should survey parents to find out why they are putting their children in other schools. Then the district should take steps to im-

prove the quality of education in the Westwood schools. "Although no one can deny that racism exists, we believe the most frequent reason parents choose other educational opportunities is not race but education quality," Overton wrote.

A recent *Detroit News* analysis also challenges Westwood's claim that school

## STUDENT FOCUS

# Student receives “second chance” at charter school

*Teen mother looks forward to bright future*

Shannon Napieralski refuses to become a statistic.

She is well aware that 70 percent of teen mothers drop out of school, but she will not be one of them. This coming June, Shannon will graduate from Bay-Arenac Community High School in the class of 2001.

“People expected me to become a ‘dead-beat,’” she says. “Not many moms do what I’m doing. But I can’t wait to graduate!”

Shannon is not only planning to finish school, but she also managed perfect attendance and all A’s during much of her time at Bay-Arenac, a stark contrast to the struggling student she was before she found the school.

Bay-Arenac is a charter school, one of the few in the state chartered by an intermediate school district. It is an alternative high school, providing personalized education programs and career preparation for students who are not served by the traditional school setting. Many of Bay-Arenac’s students are former dropouts from traditional public schools, students who have been in trouble with the law, or teen moms like Shannon. But they all share a common bond: a desire to graduate, gain work experience, and lead successful lives.

As Shannon says, Bay-Arenac is “not a school for bad kids, but a second chance.”

And Shannon definitely needed a second chance.

Her family background and former school experience made life difficult. Shannon says her brother, Sean, took care of her after her parents divorced. When she began high school, her school life was severely affected by problems at home—including her



Senior Shannon Napieralski (pictured with son Austin, 2) will beat the odds this coming June when she graduates with honors from Bay-Arenac Community High School. An estimated 70 percent of teen mothers drop out before graduating.

father’s alcoholism and the divorce.

Shannon skipped school every other day and was failing many of her classes. She says she didn’t feel comfortable in her previous school because it was too big; she needed one-on-one attention. She also needed someone to talk to about problems at home.

In her second semester of ninth grade, Shannon’s boyfriend, Earl (father of her 2-year-old son Austin), suggested she transfer to Bay-Arenac. She was so impressed with the school that she encouraged her brother

to transfer as well.

One of Shannon’s teachers admits Shannon was “very needy” when she arrived at Bay-Arenac.

“When Shannon came to us, she was very shy and struggling with low self-esteem. Shannon needed encouragement and an environment where she could feel successful. Although it took some time, she is now a wonderful student.

“She is also a good mom,” the teacher adds.

Bay-Arenac offers day care to infants and children through 2 years, along with parenting classes to teen moms and life skills classes for all students.

Shannon admits that without day care, she wouldn’t be able to attend classes. “If I wasn’t going here, I wouldn’t be in school,” she says.

Shannon also notes that the school has provided much needed support when family problems arise.

“I love it here. When I have family problems, I can talk to a counselor,” she says.

Shannon says the school, with its small enrollment—about 100 students—is like a family. The teachers and superintendent provide constant encouragement and emotional support to students, and insist on maintaining a positive, violence-free environment.

Shannon is proud of her success. She is an honor roll student, and says people from her old school hardly recognize her. Former teachers are stunned at her progress. Shannon finds this amusing and says, “They never thought I’d make it, but they were wrong.”

Shannon says last summer was a turning point for her; she decided she couldn’t wait to graduate and took on a new job. She is looking forward to attending college and plans to become an elementary teacher for disabled children.

Her advice for other students who are struggling is simple: “School is hard if you let it be. But, it goes by fast, too fast. If I can do it, anyone can!”

## TEACHER FOCUS

# Superintendent provides hope for struggling kids

*“When traditional schools don’t serve these students, we can”*

Ryan Donlan is passionate about his job.

And that passion is the driving force behind Bay-Arenac Community High School, a charter school for “at-risk” students.

Superintendent Donlan serves as a teacher, mentor, friend, and administrator to approximately 100 students at Bay-Arenac, one of the few schools in the state chartered by an intermediate school district.

The school caters to 9th through 12th graders who have struggled in the traditional public education setting. Many of Bay-Arenac’s students have been suspended or expelled from other schools, faced problems with the law, or considered dropping out of school altogether. Bay-Arenac provides a “second chance” for these students to graduate and offers work experience, internships, community service programs, and personal development classes.

Donlan is the perfect person for the job. Beginning college as a criminal justice major, he transferred to teaching in his first semester. Throughout college, he participated in numerous extracurricular activities including teaching classes to jail inmates, serving as a tutor to college students, writing for a local paper, and even performing in a rock band.

Since graduating in the early 1990s and obtaining a master’s degree, Donlan has been a teacher, athletic director, principal, and special/alternative education administrator in schools around the state. He has seen first hand the needs and struggles of “at-risk” students, and his dedication to teaching and serving these students has grown through the years.

Donlan also is an avid supporter of school choice and says the choice movement has provided options for students who are



Superintendent Ryan Donlan (left) explains during a radio interview how a committed staff of just under 10 teachers and support staff makes the difference for the 100 students served by his charter school for “at-risk” children.

not being served by traditional public schools.

“The whole beauty of the choice movement is, when traditional schools don’t serve these students, we can,” Donlan says.

Donlan calls his staff—of just under 10 teachers and support staff—“the most compassionate and wonderful people you’ll ever meet.”

Donlan admits his students have “rough” lives outside of school, so the school strives to maintain a supportive, family-like atmosphere. Students attend conflict resolution classes and must adhere to strict attendance and zero-tolerance violence poli-

cies to encourage responsibility and maintain school safety.

Bay-Arenac also provides ample opportunities for students to get involved and contribute to the “family” by encouraging group community service projects, promoting photography and art projects to decorate the school, and allowing students to provide input to the school’s board of directors.

Donlan’s positive outlook and the commitment of his staff have made Bay-Arenac an impressive operation. Students are well behaved, eager to contribute and serve others, and very proud of their accomplishments. They are open in sharing their

struggles and often-tragic stories, but quick to say the school is the best thing that has happened to them.

When problems arise between students or students and staff, they are quickly resolved through conflict management meetings and a supportive, but disciplined, student body. Donlan says the students are committed to maintaining high standards and have asked that attendance policies and expectations remain high. A student appeals board helps oversee attendance infractions, and Donlan has been impressed with the board’s pride in the school.

One student serving on the appeals board, in responding to a student who had numerous attendance policy infractions and asked for a “second chance,” said, “What do you mean a second chance? This school is your second chance.”

Donlan recounts this story with a slightly amused grin, saying this is a typical response from the students. They hold each other accountable and encourage the utmost respect for the school rules and staff.

The dedication of the students to the school is an amazing testament to Donlan’s vision. Many of Bay-Arenac’s students not only graduate, but go on to college and the work world. Two of the students drive over an hour to attend the school every day. Others balance full-time jobs while still maintaining perfect attendance. The pride they have for the school is obvious in the photos of students and staff that adorn the walls, and their many stories of tragedy-turned-triumph.

Donlan points out that the success of his school lies in the staff’s focus and motto: “It’s not about us. It’s about the students. We realize we are only as good as our next day’s work.”

# There's no place like home school

*Over a million students now part of "fastest growing trend in education"*

When asked where their school is, an ever-increasing number of American students are replying, "Home."

Nastassja and Nikita Kotlensky are just two of the many thousands of Michigan children for whom home is not just where the heart is, but also where the classroom is.

Their mother, Terry, who recently was featured in *The Detroit News*, says she began home schooling Nastassja, 11, because public schools weren't meeting her child's needs. She found home schooling to be the best fit for Nastassja and Nikita, 8, allowing each child to pursue individual academic and extracurricular interests.

"It's pretty neat to see your kids explore their interests," Terry told *The News*. "It's very rewarding to see what their accomplishments are. Nikita's never been to school. She is a grade level ahead. They are not held back by others."

Home schooling is, in fact, "arguably the fastest growing trend in education," according to the Oct. 10, 2000, *Christian Science Monitor*. Growing at an estimated 15 percent each year, the home schooling population now comprises approximately 3 percent of the U.S. student population, or more than 1.2 million students across the country.

Why is home schooling so popular? Many parents who decide to home school say they do so because they believe they can provide a better education for their children than public or private schools offer. Others voice concerns over school safety and whether the special needs of their children will be met in the typical school setting. Home schooling, they say, gives them an opportunity to tailor curricula to their children's interests, incorporate religious

teaching, and closely monitor what their children are learning.

Critics of home schooling raise questions about the competency of parents who are not certified teachers and wonder if children have ample opportunities to "socialize" with others outside of their families.

The home school movement takes these criticisms seriously. Over the years, a variety of local, state, and national associations have popped up to provide support, information, and "socialization" opportunities for home-schooling families like the Kotlenskys. Many of the groups offer curriculum guidance, extracurricular activities, sports leagues, and group classes for home-schooling families. One of Michigan's home-schooling associations, Information Network for Christian Homes (INCH), offers links to dozens of regional home schooling organizations and events on their web site, [www.inch.org](http://www.inch.org).

As for home-schooling parents' competency, research suggests that the individualized attention parents are able to give their children and the independence of the home-school academic program seem to overcome the fact that most parents aren't certified teachers. The *Washington Times* reported earlier this year that home-schooled students scored higher than their traditionally educated peers on the ACT, one of the nation's two major college-entrance exams, for the third year in a row. The average ACT assessment score was 21 nationally, but home-schooled students scored an average of 22.8.

Research from the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) also shows that home-schooled students outperform their public school peers. The HSLDA



Isaiah, Melissa, and Heather Beerbower of Midland put the finishing touches on their home science project. The state does not track how many students are home-schooled in Michigan, but estimates place the number at over 55,000.

online publication, "Home Education Across the United States," notes that home schoolers average 30 to 37 percentage points above their public school peers across all subjects, according to standardized national academic achievement test data.

HSLDA research also shows that home schoolers perform well regardless of parents' education levels, household income, or race. In fact, home schooling has been shown to significantly eliminate the disparity between white and minority achievement scores.

But perhaps the most striking statistic in the HSLDA data shows that home schoolers spend under \$1,000 per student each year, yet attain an average 85th percentile ranking on standardized test scores. Public schools spend, on average, over \$5,000 per student, attaining only a 50th percentile ranking on the same tests.

Many recent events also have encouraged the home-schooling movement and verified the growing popularity of the practice across the country. This year, the

nation's first college for home schoolers, Patrick Henry College, launched classes in Virginia, and the popular Internet retailer Amazon.com announced the creation of an online store for home schooling families.

Although state laws and regulations on home schooling vary, it is currently legal in all 50 states. Some states require home schoolers to register with the state's Department of Education, while others have few regulations on families who choose to home school. Currently, Michigan's home-schooling laws are liberal, leaving parents with complete control over curriculum. Michigan does not require parents to submit proof of teacher certification, attendance, or testing to the Department of Education.

For students and parents in Michigan and across the country, home schooling is becoming an increasingly attractive option. HSLDA provides more information on home-schooling laws, news, and organizations at its web site, [www.hsllda.org](http://www.hsllda.org).

# Schools prepare for the "Digital Age"

*Critics: reliance on computers may make students lazy*

The explosion of technological advances over the past decade has educators and politicians scrambling to ensure that every school is "wired" for the arrival of the "Digital Age."

But what does this Digital Age mean for schools, teachers, and students themselves?

For schools and education budgets, it seems to mean expense. Currently, U.S. schools are spending over \$5 billion per year on computer technology, including discounts and funding from the federal "e-rate" program. And as a result, over 95 percent of all public schools are now connected to the Internet.

In Michigan, \$73 million in e-rate funding has helped give the state its ratio of 13.1 students to every Internet-connected computer. Eighty-seven percent of Michigan schools have Internet access, with an average of 5.9 students per computer, according to data compiled by Education Week.

The education technology boom also seems to have caught educators off-guard. Some observers are expressing concern over many teachers' lack of ability to use and incorporate technology into the curriculum.

According to a 1999 survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), only a third of teachers reported feeling "well prepared" or "very well prepared" to use computers and the Internet for classroom instruction. Other surveys and studies place this "preparedness" quotient much lower.

Businesses and school officials are ad-

ressing the problem by forming teacher training initiatives and professional development programs that will allow teachers to learn about hardware, software, and ways they can incorporate technology into their lesson plans.

State officials also are struggling to address the gap in teachers' skills and the demand for high-tech classrooms. Recently, Michigan legislators approved a plan to provide laptops and computer training to Michigan's 90,000 public school teachers. The \$110-million program is intended to close the growing divide between teachers and students who have access to computers and those who don't, Gov. John Engler told the *Detroit Free Press*.

Engler also is publicizing the Michigan Virtual University, a program that allows students and teachers to take advanced placement or professional development courses over the Internet. This year, 400 students from 71 Michigan high schools are participating in advanced placement courses through the program.

The private sector is also stepping in to help. Ameritech recently announced a \$2 million program to provide intensive computer training to 2,000 Michigan teachers over the next two years.

Despite such aid, many school districts still are having difficulty incorporating technology expenses into their budgets, particularly expenses for training. According to



Approximately 87 percent of Michigan schools are connected to the Internet, but some worry that widespread availability of such software features as spell checkers and language translators will discourage students from learning these skills on their own.

Education Week, school districts spend less than 10 percent of their technology funds on training and professional development programs.

Ric Wiltse, executive director of the Michigan Association for Computer-Related Technology Users in Learning, told the *Detroit Free Press* that districts should be budgeting 50 percent of technology funds for hardware and 50 percent for training to keep up with the ever-changing field.

"Even if we spent a third as much on training as we do on hardware, technology would be used more effectively in schools," Wiltse told the *Free Press*.

The high-tech classroom is not with-

out its critics. "Techno-skeptics" have formed a California-based organization called Learning the Real World, which works to spread the message that too little is known about computers' impact on the learning process to justify the massive amounts of money and energy being expended to integrate technology into classrooms.

The critics argue that powerful software features including spell and grammar checkers, statistics programs, and language translators make it less likely that students will bother to learn academic skills on their own.

Critics also note that there is little evidence of a direct tie between computers and higher academic achievement. They point to research including a 1998 Educational Testing Service study of over 13,000 students, which showed that creative use of computers in math instruction raised test scores, but drilling with computers made scores worse.

It may be impossible to predict how technology ultimately will affect education in the coming years. Some are predicting that "cyber-schools" will be created—as a high-tech version of home schooling—where students use the Internet to take classes and earn their diplomas. Many colleges already are offering similar programs, and an entire Internet university, [YorktownUniversity.com](http://YorktownUniversity.com), has already sprung up.

One thing is certain: the Digital Age is here to stay, and this fact means teachers, parents, and administrators will be forced in the coming years to determine the appropriate measure of technology to incorporate into students' education programs.

For more information on technology in Michigan schools, visit <http://cdp.mde.state.mi.us/MCF/ContentStandards/Technology/default.html>.

## Ritalin

continued from page 3

acknowledged that behavioral changes as a result of Ritalin use did not translate into significant "improvements in academic skills or social achievement." On the other hand, numerous studies indicate Ritalin is highly effective in keeping kids quiet.

In spite of this consensus in the field, Ritalin continues to grow in popularity in public schools. Some advocacy groups complain that Ritalin has become as commonplace as backpacks and detention in some Michigan schools.

Teachers and school personnel find themselves caught up in this struggle. Most parents and teachers of children on Ritalin report an incredible initial improvement in behavior, whereas therapy for the disorder can take a long time to show similar benefit.

When a teacher has a classroom of 25 students and five are out of control, any remedy that produces immediate results will likely be welcome. Unfortunately, most students—including those without ADHD—will show improved concentration and some initial improved performance when placed on Ritalin. This has led some to accuse our schools of medicating anyone who regularly misbehaves in class, singling out boys, especially.

Others state that schools have embraced ADHD and Ritalin as a way to medicate problems that otherwise would require

special school services. Several studies claim that ADHD-diagnosed children are more likely to need special education services, regardless of their intelligence. The studies identify between 12 and 60 percent of children with ADHD as also having a learning disorder.

"Treating the child's ADHD with medication often does not change the underlying learning disabilities," says Gaffney. "It just makes the child less likely to be a behavior problem while he fails to learn."

Too often, harried school personnel appear to miss this point and grasp at the easy solution. One mother of a 5-year-old Michigan kindergartner (who asked to not be identified) reports that she has been encouraged on numerous occasions to place her child on Ritalin, despite doctor's advice that her child does not have ADHD and does not need medication. She is fearful that her child will not be passed on to the next grade unless her son is put on medication.

"This is not unusual," says Gaffney. "Many children referred to me by schools come with strong insistence the families place the child on medication. When we do convince parents to try other options first, we often hear complaints from the school."

"This is the reverse of how we work with other problems," he adds. "The process is supposed to be to identify a problem and causes first; only then do we chart the best treatment strategy. Many times schools will see the obnoxious behavior and immediately move to medication as the solution."

## Lawsuit

continued from page 1

and grievance adjustment."

The MEA, citing a provision in the membership application that Dame signed 10 years earlier, refused to accept his resignation because it did not come within the

employees who resign their union memberships.

"I've read the resolutions that the MEA endorses, and they didn't speak for my beliefs," Dame told Michigan Education Re-



Teacher Frank Dame is glad to again be focusing his undivided attention on his students after winning a lengthy legal battle over his right to resign from the Michigan Education Association.

one-month period of each year (August) when members are "allowed" to resign. This meant Dame would have to remain a member of the union and continue underwriting all union activity—including political spending he disagreed with—until August. The union also threatened a collection action for the balance of Dame's dues if he failed to make timely payment.

"I believe that the union was violating my First Amendment rights every day by restricting my right to resign," says Dame, who successfully quit the MEA on Aug. 20, 1998.

About six weeks later, on Oct. 2, Dame filed unfair labor practice charges against the MEA for refusing his April resignation. He contended that the union violated the law not only by denying his resignation but also by failing to adjust his fees downward during that time to reflect his actual nonmember status.

Under U.S. Supreme Court decisions, public unions can charge nonmembers only for the costs of representing them in collective bargaining situations. Other fees for nonrepresentational activities, including political lobbying, are not chargeable to em-

port in 1998. "I don't want my money used to support some of those positions."

MERC agreed with Dame that the unions (MEA and its West Branch affiliate) violated state law governing collective bargaining when they refused to allow Dame to terminate his union membership. The commission based its finding on the fact that the unions failed to provide Dame with notice of his rights and obligations under both state law as well as the MEA's own constitution and bylaws.

MERC ordered the unions to reimburse Dame, with interest, for any dues overcharges occurring from the time of his rejected resignation in April to his accepted resignation in August.

As for his lawsuit, Dame says, "I am extremely pleased that it resulted in bringing a measure of freedom to my fellow teachers who, like me, find themselves trapped in unwanted unions."

For additional information on the impact of this decision and how teachers can exercise their rights to freedom of speech and association, contact the Mackinac Center at (517) 631-0900 or visit [www.mackinac.org](http://www.mackinac.org) on the Internet.

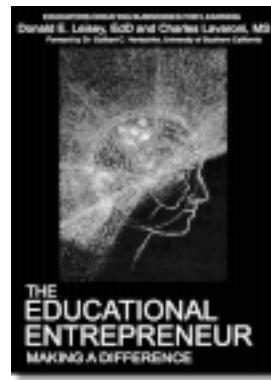
The problem is compounded by cases of overmedication. Gaffney says many children are placed on Ritalin without meeting the criteria for ADHD. This is more likely to happen when a child's parents are told by school personnel to medicate the child and the medication comes from a pediatrician inexperienced with ADHD. This places the doctor in the position of accepting diagnosis and treatment guidelines from the school

without quality checks. The American Academy of Pediatrics is attempting to stem this problem by publishing guidelines for pediatricians to follow.

The controversy over Ritalin in our schools will likely continue, as there appear to be no easy answers. Ritalin seems to be a necessary and helpful drug for some people with ADHD, but potentially harmful and inappropriate for many who are referred for it.

## The Educational Entrepreneur: Making A Difference

By Donald E. Leisey, EdD, and Charles Lavaroni, MS



The authors, former public school superintendents and private school owners, celebrate the lives of twenty two educators who have built a wide variety of successful businesses for improving education and learning.

Learn how these men and women focused their passion to create exciting programs, products, services or technologies that enhance learning experiences for students.

**A MUST READ FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN IMPROVING EDUCATION**

Visit our web site at [www.edentrepreneurs.org](http://www.edentrepreneurs.org)

1-800-804-0021



## 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.

**LUTHERAN  
Special Education  
MINISTRIES**

FOUNDED 1873 • Holy Trinity Lutheran School for the Deaf •  
6861 Nevada, Detroit, Michigan 48234 • (313) 368-1226

## School Board Members, Educators, Parents, Business Leaders and Concerned Citizens. . .

You are invited to attend the Second Anniversary Banquet  
of the Michigan School Board Leaders Association  
Thursday, March 15, 7:00 pm in Lansing  
Join us for a patriotic evening focusing on  
*The American Dream*

For more information contact MSBLA: 810-658-7667 or [info@msbla.org](mailto:info@msbla.org)

MSBLA is an organization of education leaders from traditional public, charter and private schools; business and state leaders; and concerned citizens who are dedicated to accelerating academic achievement through parent and child-centered education reforms.

Michigan  
School  
Board  
Leaders  
Association

**MSBLA**

To read highlights from last year's banquet go to:  
<http://www.educationreport.org/article.asp?ID=2883>



# Teachers Saving Children

Inc. of Michigan



Fighting for LIFE in Education...

Lois Wierenga, President  
(616) 364-6421  
3442 Olderidge  
Grand Rapids, MI 49525-3025

# Parents, not schools, must ultimately be responsible for children



**Lori Yaklin**

Lori Yaklin is executive director of the Michigan School Board Leaders Association.

Few deny that there is an education crisis in this country. But even fewer seem to agree on the causes of, and solution to, the crisis.

Many suggest that the way to boost academic achievement is to give more money to schools. But the fact that national SAT scores have declined 73 points since 1960 while education spending has increased 200 percent (in real dollars) suggests that the education crisis is not so much a question of lack of spending, but lack of spending priorities. Could it be that we as a society have simply overburdened the public school system with demands that detract from the legitimate mission of academic achievement?

We have locked ourselves in a bitter cycle. The more that parents abdicate their traditional child-rearing responsibilities, the more the public school system steps in to assume those responsibilities. And the more the schools fulfill these responsibilities, the more parents and society come to depend on government to take actions which were historically in the domain of the family.

Students of organizational theory will recognize this phenomenon as a classic example of the theory of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity dictates that a higher or more centralized organization (in this case, the government school system) shouldn't take on responsibilities that can be performed by a lower or more local organization (in this case, the individual or family) because this ultimately leads to a "de-skilled" lower organization.

Schools systematically de-skill and disengage parents who come to depend on education professionals for much more than academic instruction. In 1960, when SAT scores were at their all-time high, education professionals were focusing on academic

achievement because families had not abdicated their traditional responsibilities. Today, school officials are making many non-academic decisions for children, including inappropriate medical and psychological judgments that leave schools wide open to lawsuits.

A recent Detroit News editorial encouraged Livonia schools to get out of the business of measuring children's body fat after a parent complained that his 7-year-old daughter stopped eating after a teacher's body-fat diagnosis. The News urged the schools to, "Leave lifestyle issues where they belong, with the family."

Parents across the country are complaining that school officials are making pseudo-diagnoses of Attention Deficit Disorder and are barring children from school unless the student is put on the prescribed stimulant Ritalin. In some cases, such as one presented to Congress this year, school officials are calling Child Protective Services and charging parents with medical neglect for refusing to drug their children.

Recently two Georgia parents learned that a school counselor drove their 13- and 15-year-old daughters to a county health clinic where they received Pap smears, AIDS tests, condoms, and birth control pills. The parents' permission was never requested and the school and the clinic told the parents that the parents did not have the right to the test results because of patient confidentiality.

This sort of incident will be repeated as long as government continues to offer more money to schools that take on additional responsibilities. In a 1996 letter, a Medicaid consultant rebuked a superintendent for not using enough federal tax dollars, helpfully noting that, "Medicaid . . . has been expanded to cover not only therapies, but also social work and psychological services, nursing and audiological services, hearing and vision screening, and transportation." Later in the letter, the consultant offered that "the potential for dollars is limitless."

The government also encourages school-based health clinics that provide mental health services using Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Medicaid funding. Since 1991, IDEA has included children with such controversial emotional disabilities as Attention Deficit Disorder. And Medicaid funds can even be spent to help a child deal with "academic trauma caused by breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend."

The end result of the schools' increased responsibilities is a culture in which parents become accountable to the schools, rather than the schools being accountable to parents. This is best exemplified by the Chicago public school system's issuance of parent report cards in which parents are graded, and those who do not spend enough "quality time" with their children get a home visit from school officials.

It cannot be disputed that the breakdown of the family has led many well-meaning policy-makers to heap more responsibilities on the schools, but right now schools are sending parents a subtle, yet undeniable, message: "Don't worry, we'll handle everything. Just get them on the bus in the morning."

But we must ask ourselves if we should expect schools to become one-stop shops for all of a child's needs. Should we expect overworked teachers to now be trained in psychology and make medical assessments of children? Should we encourage parents to transfer their responsibilities to government officials?

It could be that the United States will not see a rise in academic achievement until the roles of parents and schools are once again properly aligned.

For more information, visit [www.msbla.org](http://www.msbla.org).

Keep Your **Free** Subscription!

E-mail your name and address to [MER@EducationReport.org](mailto:MER@EducationReport.org). (Or see page 2 for postal address and fax number.)



## The right choice for children, parents and teachers.

National Heritage Academies provides true choice for parents and educators committed to lifting scholastic standards.

- Tuition-free charter schools, accessible to all.
- Safe, modern, stimulating environment.
- Challenging academic standards, back-to-basics approach.
- Universal moral principles woven into daily lessons.
- Certified, respected, well compensated teachers.
- Strong, consistent parental involvement.

Over the past two years, National Heritage Academy students have scored 35% above the national average on standardized tests. Our tuition-free charter schools provide both choice and educational excellence throughout the state of Michigan.

We welcome your questions and concerns.



980 Spaulding Ave. SE Grand Rapids, MI 49546  
Phone 616-222-1700 or 1-800-889-6235  
[www.heritageacademies.com](http://www.heritageacademies.com)



**Giving Parents a Choice.**

**Giving Children a Chance.**

*Education Freedom Fund is a private scholarship program that offers tuition assistance to low-income families in Michigan. In nearly a decade of charitable service, Education Freedom Fund scholarships have benefited almost 9,000 children.*

To learn more about Education Freedom Fund, how to apply for a scholarship, or where to make a tax-deductible contribution: please call toll free 800-866-8141 or visit our website at [www.educationfreedomfund.org](http://www.educationfreedomfund.org).

# Debate Workshops 2001

Coming to a city near you this fall...  
Stay tuned for more info.

[www.mackinac.org/features/debate](http://www.mackinac.org/features/debate)

# Teachers should know their rights



**Robert Hunter**

*Robert Hunter, a former National Labor Relations Board member, is director of labor policy at the Mackinac Center.*

Every year, tens of thousands of Michigan public school teachers are forced to surrender a substantial portion of their paychecks to the Michigan Education Association (MEA) and its parent union, the National Education Association (NEA). Some of this money goes to legitimate employee representation duties, including contract negotiation and grievance processing. But a large amount of members' dues dollars is spent on union lobbying, political campaigns, and the promotion of controversial social causes.

What can teachers do if they disagree with the NEA and MEA's moral, political, and social agendas—or if they just want to keep more of their own money?

Fortunately for such public school employees, there are legal rights available to them in these compulsory union situations. Many are unaware of these rights because union leaders all too often fail to notify members of their legal options. But these rights, established by U.S. Supreme Court decisions, are the law of the land regardless of what a collective bargaining agreement says or what individual teachers might otherwise be told.

All teachers and other public school employees have the right to:

- **Join or not join a workplace union.** Membership in a union is optional, and teachers cannot legally be compelled to join at any time.

- **Resign membership in a union.** Some unions, like the MEA, attempt to place restrictions on how and when they will accept member resignations. This practice has been declared illegal by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission in a recent case involving an MEA member. Consequently, union members in similar situations may be able to resign at any time.

- **Eliminate financial support for a workplace union's non-representation activities.** Teachers who refuse to join their workplace union or who resign their membership are legally obligated to pay only those dues or fees necessary to

cover the expenses of essential union representation duties such as collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance processing. All other portions of union dues, including those that go to political, social, and ideological causes, are not legally chargeable to nonunion teachers who object to funding these activities.

- **Receive a full explanation of any and all fees charged by a workplace union.** Public-sector unions must provide nonmember employees with an explanation of any fees charged, an independent accountant's verification of the fees, and an explanation of the procedures under which the nonunion employees can challenge the union fees before a neutral third party.

- **Challenge a workplace union's fee assessments.** Nonunion employees have the right to challenge the amount their union charges them before an impartial decision-maker, to receive proper notice and information of this right, and to have the disputed fees escrowed until the challenge is resolved.

How do teachers or other public school employees exercise these rights? First, they must resign their union membership and state their objections to funding superfluous union activities in writing. The union is then required to explain what an employee must continue to pay for its representation services only, and how it calculated this amount. Employees have a period of time in which they can reconsider and continue to pay full union dues, or resign to take advantage of the reduced union fee.

Teachers and other public school employees should of course weigh carefully their decision to join or remain in a union, as there are distinct advantages and disadvantages to either choice. As nonmembers, employees pay a reduced fee, are not subject to union discipline or fines, and are legally entitled to the same representation services as union members. Likewise, nonmembers enjoy all of the benefits of the union's collective bargaining agreement with the employer. Nonmembers may, however, be denied member rights including the ability to attend union meetings; ratify or reject collective bargaining agreements; vote in union elections, and receive any financial benefits provided by the union, such as a union credit card, discounted auto insurance rates, and so on.

But even as nonunion members, employees still enjoy workplace protections under Michigan's Public Employee Relations Act (PERA) without joining a union.

The law protects employees who engage in lawful concerted activities with other employees for the purposes of collective negotiation, bargaining, or other mutual aid and protection, even if no union represents the employees.

As we enter a new century, it is important to recognize that the confrontational 19th-century factory model of labor relations—with its legalized compulsion funded by forced dues—is not necessarily the best model for our schools. After all, schools are not factories, teachers are not assembly line workers, and students are not widgets. The current rigid and standardized approach to employee representation only discourages innovation and creativity at a time when citizens and teachers are struggling to find solutions to improve education for all Michi-

gan children.

Educators are professionals and should expect to be treated as such. Perhaps when more teachers and other public school employees take advantage of their rights, unions will be more inclined to abandon their old ways and embrace professionalism instead of molding teachers into rank-and-file factory workers.

*For more information on public school employees' rights, visit [www.mackinac.org](http://www.mackinac.org).*



Finally! An association for teachers who care more about our children's education than they do with just their own benefits!

*You are invited to join the ...*  
**Association of American Educators.**

For educators and education advocates who have been wishing for a *professional* alternative to the partisan politics and controversial social agendas of the monopolistic teacher unions, this is it!

The Association of American Educators (AAE) is incorporated as a nonprofit, professional trade association. Membership in the AAE is open to any employee of an educational entity. Our reasonable annual dues are \$99 which includes a \$1,000,000 professional educators liability insurance policy!

In addition, parents, business leaders, and legislators can support the AAE by becoming Associate Members at only \$25 per year and receive our monthly newsletter - *Education Matters*. This right-to-the-point publication keeps you informed on key issues in education with a refreshing perspective you will not find in the union-affiliated and values-neutral publications that proliferate today.

### Some AAE members speak out -

*"AAE represents that which is best in educators and that which is sorely needed - professionalism and a focus on children first. This stands in stark contrast to the current environment of special interests protecting the status quo and lobbying for controversial social issues using teachers' dues."*

Tracey Bailey  
1993 National Teacher of the Year

*"AAE is reasoned, balanced, and classroom-oriented, leaving politics to political entities."*

Dr. Lewis Hodge  
Professor of Education,  
University of Tennessee

*"This is what I have been waiting for! AAE is a positive voice for all of us who still embrace traditional values and see teaching as one of the highest callings."*

Guy Doud  
1987 National Teacher of the Year

*"I save hundreds of dollars every year from what I paid in union dues by joining AAE. Membership in this organization just makes good economic sense."*

Sandra Lastra  
1995 Outstanding New Mexico  
Teacher of the Year



*Our common bond is our shared concern for America's children*

For more information call our toll-free number **1-800-704-7799** or visit our website at [www.aaeteachers.org](http://www.aaeteachers.org).

## TeachersforChoice



*Are you a public school teacher who supports parental choice in education?  
Do you want more choices in how you practice your profession?*

Let your voice be heard!

*TeachersforChoice is a network of public school teachers working to improve education for children and teachers in Michigan.*

**TeachersforChoice.org**

COMMENTARY

# Schools should stand behind their diplomas



**Michael S. Shibley, Ph.D.**

*Dr. Michael S. Shibley is superintendent of Rockford Public Schools in Rockford, Michigan.*

In September 2000, the Midland-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy released a study that quantified how much Michigan institutions of higher learning and businesses spend to accommodate the lack of basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills among high school graduates and employees. At least one-third of Michigan students are leaving our schools in need of remedial education and it's costing the state's businesses and universities more than \$600 million annually.

The study was not a condemnation of all public schools, but it should serve to encourage districts in Michigan to guarantee their communities that they are providing students with basic academic skills. Study author Dr. Jay P. Greene recommended that districts: a) adopt a test that students must pass before receiving diplomas and b) hold themselves financially liable for graduates who need remedial education.

I am proud to report that Rockford Pub-

lic Schools recognized this need long ago and implemented measures to ensure our community that we are graduating students who possess basic academic competencies. In fall 1989, the Rockford Public Schools Board of Education surveyed the community to determine what expectations residents and district employees have for their school system. One of the questions asked if students should be required to demonstrate proficiency in basic reading and mathematics prior to earning a high school diploma. Over 94 percent of the respondents said yes.

In 1991, following a comprehensive pilot program, our Board of Education implemented a competency testing component as part of the requirements for a high school diploma. This component requires students to take mathematics and reading tests during the spring of their freshman year. If a student fails either one of the tests, he or she must select one of several options for remediation prior to retaking the test or tests the following school year. Successful completion of both tests is a prerequisite for earning a high school diploma from Rockford Public Schools.

Students completing all course work and other requirements for a diploma *except* for passing both competency tests are issued a "certificate of completion" in place of a diploma. Students may return after their

senior year and retake the tests and, if successful, are only then issued a diploma.

Because students must successfully complete the competency tests prior to earning a diploma, Rockford Public Schools guarantees that students graduating with a diploma do indeed possess basic skills in mathematics and reading. If an employer who hires a Rockford graduate does not believe that the former student has those skills to do his or her job, the employer is encouraged to contact me with those concerns. I will then offer the graduate remedial classes in the area in which he or she is deficient, free of charge, through our adult education program. Information on this service is prominently displayed on each diploma, and it is communicated throughout the greater Grand Rapids area.

The competency testing initiative was implemented with the ninth-grade class of 1991, having a direct impact on the 1995 graduates. The class of 2001 will be the seventh senior class required to meet the competency testing requirement for a high school diploma. I am unaware of any other

Michigan school district that offers such a program or that otherwise guarantees the real meaning of its diplomas.

Since the initial community-wide questionnaire in 1989, three additional surveys have followed, each including the competency testing questions. Results continue to be overwhelming: Parents strongly support maintaining this requirement for a diploma.

The testing initiative is not intended to be punitive in nature. It was developed instead to both encourage students to be active participants in their education as well as promote the community's and employers' confidence in their local schools.

I encourage all public school districts in Michigan to hold themselves accountable by adopting competency testing that reflects the expectations and desires of the community and ensuring that the diplomas they grant are representative of academic achievement. Our communities and children deserve nothing less than a quality education from every public school in our state. It is time we all stood behind our diplomas.

## Election Recap

*continued from page 1*

hood development in public schools. The state's largest school employee union hopes its campaign for public school improvement will dissuade the state from seeking control of failing districts and dampen the public discussion over school choice.

### Michigan Board of Education

Eleven candidates fought for two seats in the Michigan Board of Education race, with Democrats winning both on Nov. 7.

Democratic incumbent Kathleen Straus earned a second eight-year term, while Democrat John Austin won the seat that will be vacated by Republican Dorothy Beardmore in January.

The eight-member board, evenly split between Democrats and Republicans before the election, now stands at five Democrats and three Republicans. The board sets policy for public education in the state of Michigan.

### Other ballot initiatives

Voters across the country approved and rejected numerous education-related ballot proposals on Election Day.

Arizona voters approved a proposal that will end bilingual education, while Oregon voters rejected a performance-pay plan for teachers.

California voters rejected a voucher proposal 71 to 29 percent. Tim Draper, head of the California voucher campaign, says he will work to place the issue before the public again in the future.

Washington citizens rejected a proposal that would have allowed for more charter schools, by a margin of four percent. Washington citizens approved initiatives that will reduce class size, provide teacher training, and increase teacher pay.

## "Economics is My Favorite Class!"

Is it hard to picture your students rushing home to tell Mom and Dad how much fun they had in your econ class today?

If you're like most high school economics teachers, you're probably way over being upset that only a few students per semester seem able to catch your passion for "the dismal science." In the back of your mind, though, you still wonder whether things could be different....

They can be. The Foundation for Teaching Economics (FTE) provides weeklong, residential programs that show economics teachers how to use engaging games and simulations that help students see that "economics is everywhere." At the same time, you get a better understanding of economic principles, lesson plans, and materials to use in your classroom, and the skills and confidence to become a better teacher.

Join us July 15-21, 2001 at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Mich. for "Economics for Leaders," a FREE, week-long professional development program featuring intellectually stimulating participant workshops and opportunities for one-on-one discussions with outstanding university professors and mentor instructors.

For further details please contact the Foundation for Teaching Economics at (800) 383-4335.



*There is a solution to the crisis in education. But it takes leaders like you.*

Get involved in the effort to improve education for all Michigan children. Call (517) 631-0900 and find out how you can become a part of the Mackinac Center's Education Reform Leadership Project today!



## OPTIMIZE YOUR BRAIN

*"He gets upset if I try to help him figure out a word; he wants to do it all himself. His school work goes much faster now."*

—Testimonial of mother whose child increased 6.8 grade levels after 6 hours of instruction

Find out more by calling 810.732.4810

E-mail: ooprc@iflint.com

Website: oopinc.com

## Freedom of Speech. Freedom of Association.

**As a teacher and a professional, you should know all your rights.**

- Join or change unions.
- Resign from a union.
- Form a new union.
- Keep more of your money.

For more information, call the Mackinac Center at 517-631-0900 and ask for your free brochures.

## Education Reform Hillsdale Style



**HILLSDALE ACADEMY is pleased to offer the Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide.**

The *Guide* outlines the proven academic curriculum used by our teachers at Hillsdale Academy for grades K-8. Based on results from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, these fundamentals work: Our students consistently score in the top four percent nationally.

Designed to foster values-centered education among public and private school administrators, teachers, and organizations interested in establishing independent schools or improving existing ones, the *Guide* is available for \$175. This fee covers the following contents:

- K-8 Curriculum Outline
- School Culture Document
- Reading Lists
- Parents' Handbook
- Faculty Handbook
- Introductory Video
- Publishers' List
- Weekly Curriculum Outlines

- Complete package for \$175
- Videotape Only for \$10



NAME

ADDRESS

CITY/STATE/ZIP

PHONE (  )

My check payable to **Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide** is enclosed.

Charge my: VISA / MASTERCARD / DISCOVER

Card No.  Exp. Date

Signature/Date

**MAIL TO:** Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide, Hillsdale College, Dept. MER-2, Hillsdale, MI 49242  
OR CALL TOLL-FREE: 1-800-989-7323

## Diverse Viewpoints

## Is school choice dead in Michigan?

*The people of Michigan do not want vouchers*

Is school choice dead in Michigan? Yes, it is—and supporters of church-state separation and public schools are dancing on its grave.

Perhaps that's being facetious—and a bit hasty. No political concept is ever truly dead. Like a vampire in a grade-B horror movie, bad ideas have a way of resurrecting when you least expect them. But if the discussion is about school choice in terms of vouchers, it would appear that Michigan voters are keeping a sharp stake close by, just in case.

Voucher supporters need to face some sobering facts. Proposal 1, the latest voucher referendum in Michigan, wasn't just beaten on Nov. 7, it was trounced. Michigan voters rejected the plan 69 percent to 31 percent. This happened even though voucher boosters outspent voucher opponents by a 2-1 margin. It happened despite backing from the influential Roman Catholic hierarchy and an influx of big money for glitzy television ads. It happened even though the plan was relatively modest in the sense that it would not have set up a statewide voucher program overnight (like California's also-doomed Proposition 38).

Yet Proposal 1 still lost in every Michigan county. It even lost in heavily urban Wayne County. This is significant because voucher proponents claim that minority groups are eager to get vouchers. But in Wayne County, Proposal 1 was actually defeated by a slightly higher margin than in the rest of the state.

This is the third defeat for tax aid to religious and other private schools at the Michigan ballot box since 1970. It should send a message to voucher supporters: The people of Michigan do not support vouchers. They do not want them.

This does not mean the people do not want public school reform. They do. They just don't see vouchers as serious reform. What do they want instead? National opinion polls point the way. In exit polls conducted by the Washington Post on Election Day, 78 percent of voters nationally said they prefer fixing troubled public schools, while 16 percent opted for vouchers.

An earlier Phi Delta Kappa poll found most respondents rejecting a central article of faith held by voucher proponents: That vouchers will improve education across the board by forcing schools to compete with one another. In the poll, only 19 percent thought this would happen. That same poll found that support for vouchers generally has declined over the past few years.

What does all of this mean? To begin with, it means that most Americans remain firmly supportive of the public school system. A chief reason for this may be that most Americans are happy with their local public school. Polling data consistently show a curious dichotomy: Many Americans have concerns about the overall public school system, but they generally give high marks to their neighborhood school or the one their own children attend.

Polls also show that most Americans believe that troubled public schools—and it would be naïve to pretend that such institutions do not exist—should be fixed. Americans simply do not favor turning the children in these schools over to the uncertainties of the free market through voucher plans.

Americans celebrate the free market, but they are aware of its shortcomings. When it comes to education, many people believe that private schools, which are only lightly regulated by the state, may refuse admission to students who don't measure up academically. They are also aware that private schools may deny admission to or expel students based on other criteria—such as the student being the “wrong” religion, lack of sufficient involvement by the parents, crowding, or simply because the private institution wants to give the space to someone else. Americans do not want to give tax funds to institutions that discriminate. They see it as an issue of basic fairness.

Americans are also aware that public schools educate about 90 percent of our children. No private institution has shown the inclination, ability, or desire to take on this task. Private schools would rather keep doing what they do now—cherry pick their students. Most people support a private school's right to do this but believe it makes them ineligible for tax support.

Finally, the separation of church and state is crucial. To many people, this is the most compelling reason why vouchers are a bad idea. Most private schools are religious in nature. Many integrate sectarian teachings into their entire curriculum. Americans have no problem with this, but they don't necessarily want to pay for it. Religion should be funded by voluntary contributions, not by money coerced from the taxpayer by government fiat.

Is school choice dead in Michigan? There are many types of choice plans. Some may yet remain viable. But in the wake of the overwhelming defeat of Proposal 1 by the voters, politicians and voucher supporters alike need to take the hint. The people of Michigan do not support vouchers. It's time to move on to real and meaningful school reform.

Barry Lynn is executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State in Washington, D.C. He is an ordained minister and an attorney.



Barry Lynn

YES



Tom Bray

NO

*Inability of system to reform itself remains impetus for choice*

Reports of the death of educational choice, like reports of Mark Twain's death, are likely to prove highly premature. Despite the recent failure of vouchers at Michigan polls, there are other school choice ideas waiting in the wings for a test, possibly as early as 2004. Meanwhile, the demand for more charter schools remains high and thousands of students continue to take advantage of Michigan's existing public school choice programs.

In 1970, when the Michigan government tried to funnel some money to private schools, the result was a constitutional amendment banning virtually all forms of “parochial aid.” In 1978, when churches and others pushed a measure to repeal the amendment and adopt a voucher system, it was crushed by a 3-1 vote.

Michigan voters once again sent a strong message on Nov. 7: no mixing of taxpayer dollars and private education. The latest voucher initiative in Michigan, Proposal 1, went down to a stinging defeat by more than a 2-1 margin.

Backers of Proposal 1 had hoped that their more carefully targeted measure would meet with approval. It was aimed mainly at “failing” school districts so the majority of voters wouldn't feel threatened by the plan. The costs to taxpayers were portrayed as marginal. And the campaign in favor of Proposal 1 was generously financed to the tune of nearly \$13 million.

And still the proposal seemed to sink like a stone. The same happened to California's Proposition 38, which would have installed a statewide voucher system and was even more lavishly financed by Silicon Valley entrepreneur Tim Draper. Though some voucher supporters are complaining that their measures might have done better if Republicans like Gov. John Engler had supported their efforts, the message still seems clear: Voters just don't buy vouchers.

Dick DeVos, the very determined Amway Corp. executive, said the pro-voucher Kids First! Yes! team would remain intact for now.

“We plan to learn as much as we can from this experience, share it with others, and then use the lessons for future campaigns,” said DeVos.

Just where the future choice efforts will take place is not yet certain. It's unlikely that anybody will run vouchers back up the flagpole in Michigan any time soon. And the idea that the best route to educational choice lies through direct appeals to voters has been severely damaged by the California and Michigan experiences.

This suggests an incremental approach to reform, much as Democrats switched to an incremental approach to health care reform after outright nationalization failed.

The Michigan Legislature is expected to consider raising the cap on charter schools in the next session. More school districts in Michigan are actively participating in the schools-of-choice program, allowing students to transfer between public school districts.

On a national level, the Supreme Court has upheld programs in states that allow the use of taxpayer funding for private schools if the purpose is primarily educational. One such program in Cleveland was recently struck down by an Ohio federal court, and that decision may yet be appealed to the Supreme Court. And President-elect George W. Bush has vowed to voucherize some of the federal money that flows to K-12 schools—essentially an extension of the principle behind the G.I. Bill and Pell grants.

Other proposals for encouraging educational choice might yet succeed in places like Michigan, which have strict constitutional limits on direct aid to private and parochial schools. The Mackinac Center for Public Policy has put forward a tax-credit approach that it believes might avoid much of the constitutional baggage of Proposal 1, allowing parents to choose their child's school and take a tax credit for a portion of the tuition paid. Under the plan, no state money would flow directly to private schools.

The most powerful impetus for choice measures in Michigan and around the country remains the inability of the existing system to right itself. Detroit voters could be

scared by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the political establishment into rallying around the public school monopoly one more time. But if the current reform effort shows signs of flagging—as some believe it already is—there is likely to be growing pressure for the kind of built-in accountability that educational competition would provide.

Washington-based conservative activist Grover Norquist notes that “our polling consistently shows that even people who oppose vouchers support the idea of educational choice by substantial margins. They see the need for alternatives.”

And what is often forgotten is that the idea of educational choice is attractive to committed liberals as well as conservatives. It was no accident that the very Democratic mayor of Milwaukee, John Norquist, has been one of the most ardent backers of vouchers. And before the Democratic establishment whipped Detroit's powerful black ministers back into line, there was increasing talk of educational choice as the new civil right of our times.

The idea of school choice remains alive and well in the minds of many parents who want nothing more than the best education possible for their children. Sooner or later, those parents, whether in Michigan or elsewhere, are going to find a way to act on that idea.

Tom Bray is a columnist for *The Detroit News* and *OpinionJournal.com*. He has served as a reporter, bureau chief, and member of the editorial page staff for *The Wall Street Journal* and an editor for *The Detroit News*.



Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of Michigan Education Report.

Tell us what you think: “Is school choice dead in Michigan?” Send your comments to

Michigan Education Report • Letters to the Editor • c/o Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568 • Midland, Michigan 48640 • (517) 631-0900 • Fax (517) 631-0964  
www.EducationReport.org • Letters@EducationReport.org