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Redford could keep teachers

Private group guarantees \$350,000 savings for district to save jobs

The Redford Union School District has yet to accept an offer from the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a Midland-based research and educational institute, to help obtain the money needed to retain eight public school teachers who have been reassigned due to budget cuts. Earlier this year, the budget cuts prompted parents to raise money through bake sales, magic shows, and other means to keep children

with their teachers.

In a Feb. 2 letter to then-Superintendent Thomas Gay, Mackinac Center Senior Vice President Joseph Overton stated that the district could save well over \$350,000 by outsourcing non-instructional services such as transportation, cafeteria, and janitorial services to private firms. If an outsourcing plan failed to yield the needed savings while maintaining or improving current service

quality, the center would pay Redford Schools the difference up to \$350,000.

"We sometimes lose sight of the simple fact that children are the focus of our school system, and that teachers are the ones who work hard each day to make a difference in their lives," Overton wrote. "If we have to choose between overly expensive support services and teachers, we say protect the

REDFORD continued on page 4

SHORT SUBJECTS

Tom Watkins is the new state superintendent of schools. Watkins, former state mental health director, was chosen in February by the state Board of Education to become the new superintendent, following the five-year tenure of retiring Superintendent Arthur Ellis. Watkins is known for helping to establish Michigan's first charter school in the early 1990s.

More than 26,000 students took advantage of Michigan's public schools-of-choice program in 2000 to enroll in schools outside their district boundaries, according to data compiled by the Michigan Department of Education. Despite many districts' restrictions or refusal to participate in the program, this number is three times what it was at the program's inception four years ago.

More charter schools could be authorized statewide if the Upper Peninsula's Bay Mills Community College takes advantage of its status as a tribal school. Under Michigan law, community colleges can open charter schools only in their enrollment areas. Because Bay Mills serves Native Americans throughout Michigan, its "area" is the entire state. Recently, the college chartered two schools in the Lower Peninsula.



Enrollment at Inkster public schools is up for the first time in years after Edison Schools, a private educational management company, was hired to run the district. Students and parents seem to be pleased with recent changes in the district's schools.

Edison spurs controversy, reform in Michigan and United States

To some observers, private educational management organizations are a blessing to public education, bringing much-needed innovation and improvement to the struggling schools they're increasingly being hired to run.

To others, the for-profit companies are a source of controversy and consternation, uncaring corporations willing to sacrifice educational progress for the sake of their bottom lines.

What is the truth about these organizations, which—as readily admitted by both advocates and critics—are playing an ever-larger role in public education today? Perhaps the best way to answer that question is to look more closely at what they are and what they do.

Edison Schools

Edison Schools, the best known educational management organization in the United States, currently operates over 25 schools in Michigan and 113 schools across the country that serve more than 57,000 students. In Michigan, Edison is best known for assuming operation of the Inkster public school district and offering to reform some of Detroit's worst public schools.

Edison has faced intense opposition
INKSTER continued on page 2

School board president recounts struggle to increase classroom spending

Privatization of non-educational services derailed

Over 50 legislative staffers, policy-makers, and education reformers crowded into a Lansing restaurant March 15 to lunch and listen as a school board president told of her clash with the Michigan Education Association (MEA) over reforms designed to boost classroom spending.

Mary Rogala of the Arvon Township Public Schools Board of Education described the threats, lawsuits, and intimidation tactics that characterized the district's contract negotiations last summer.

Declining enrollment at Arvon, a tiny 10-student district in the Upper Peninsula, forced the five-member volunteer school board to examine ways to better spend Arvon's \$260,000 annual budget, over \$100,000 of which was being used on the transportation, food, and janitorial services provided by five unionized district employees.

"It was costing us eleven dollars per child per day to serve lunch," Rogala told the audience. "That's the price of a good steak dinner at Tony's steak house."

The Arvon Board of Education pro-

posed a "School Excellence Plan" that would save the district over 30 percent on the cost of non-instructional services by contracting those services out to private providers, while still allowing district

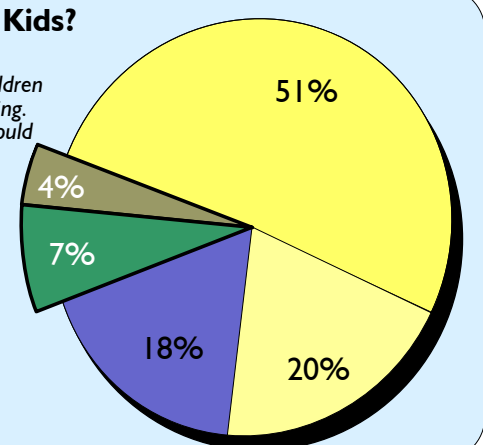
ROGALA continued on page 4

Education at a Glance

Drink, Smoke, and Gamble...for Kids?

More than 10% of Michigan's School Aid Fund is comprised of taxes on behaviors we try to steer children away from, including drinking, smoking, and gambling. But over a billion dollars in public school funding would be lost if adults ceased engaging in these activities.

| in millions | |
|-------------|------------------------|
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Inkster

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in its efforts to manage schools across the country. Currently in San Francisco a local school board is attempting to revoke a contract with Edison which allowed the company to operate an elementary school. The board claims Edison has not lived up to its promises and may be discriminating against students. Edison firmly denies the charges.

In New York City, Edison recently lost a vote that would have allowed the company to manage five of the city's poorly performing schools. Much of the opposition to the proposal came from the local teacher unions, which vehemently campaigned against Edison. The unions oppose added demands that Edison may have made on teachers, such as longer school days.

Edison also faced criticism recently in Michigan with the release of a Western Michigan University (WMU) study, funded by the National Education Association, the country's largest teachers' union and a vocal opponent of charter schools and educational management companies. The WMU study said that Edison was no more successful at boosting student achievement than the districts that hired the company.

The study conceded that Edison students show improvement gains from year to year on standardized tests, but claimed that Edison-run schools do not perform as well as the company advertises.

John Chubb, chief education officer and executive vice president for Edison, told the Detroit Free Press the study is "a biased report that was set up from the start to criticize Edison Schools." Chubb also told the Free Press that the study was unscientific and the data used were old and incomplete.

Despite the intense opposition to Edison, few people know how Edison Schools started, how it operates, and why it's looked to as a leader in education reform.

Designing a school model

Chris Whittle, an entrepreneur with over 25 years of experience in the education and publishing fields, founded Edison Schools in 1992. For three years, Whittle, along with a team of education researchers, teachers, school administrators, and curriculum developers, conducted extensive research and developed a design for innovative schools that could operate at public school spending levels.

Edison's researchers traveled the world to visit the best schools, meet with education experts, and review vast volumes of research on education, from curriculum building to school finance. The product of this research was a dynamic model for Edison Schools, incorporating what the company deems the most effective administrative and teaching practices with the best learning environment and curriculum. Edison's team designed a school model to serve students, parents, and the community at large by instituting schedules, programs, and technologies that would encourage parental involvement and help connect community groups and resources to families.

Using 10 fundamental principles as a guide, Edison instituted many practices it has become famous for, such as a longer school year, before- and after-school opportunities for students, professional development time each day for teachers, portable computers for students and teachers, and "learning contracts" between parents and teachers.

After the model was developed, Edison began opening its first schools in 1995. The number of Edison-run schools across the country has grown rapidly in every subsequent year. Edison implements its school design in traditional public schools, which the company operates under management contracts with local school districts, and charter schools.

Edison's school design incorporates a number of accountability measures to ensure children are learning basic skills and performing at their potential. One of the measures Edison has in place is a "Benchmark Assessment" system, allowing teachers to use standardized tests to monitor student progress every few months. Edison schools also participate in state and national assessment tests.

Despite enrolling a high percentage of disadvantaged students who struggled in traditional schools, Edison-run schools are posting achievement gains on state and national assessments. On average, Edison reports that students are moving up 7 percentile points per year on state assessment tests; and, since opening, 85 percent of Edison-run schools have posted positive achievement trends.

Perhaps the most notable accountability measure in Edison schools is the Quarterly Learning Contract. The contract is an agreement between a student, the parents of that student, and the student's teachers. It defines each person's responsibilities in the educational process. The contracts allow each student to have a personalized education plan that focuses on individual areas of greatest need. Contracts include a specific goal established for a student each quarter, such as improving reading skills. Tasks to be performed in achieving the goal are also listed in the contract and the student, parents, and teacher sign the contract.

Running a district

Quarterly Learning Contracts are one of the many changes made in Inkster schools last year, when Edison took over. Going into the 1999-2000 school year, the suburban Detroit district was facing dismally low graduation rates, a burgeoning deficit, and alarming enrollment losses due to students taking advantage of Michigan's schools-of-choice program.

When the state threatened to take over the district, the school board became willing to consider a new approach to its problems: contracting the daily operation of Inkster schools to Edison, in the hope that the company could turn things around.

The Inkster school board voted to contract with Edison in February 2000. By September, Edison had assumed operation of the entire district. Edison-

Inkster Superintendent Terry Ann Boguth says so far the results have been more than encouraging.

"Since last year [when the contract with Edison was announced], enrollment has increased 15 percent, the first enrollment increase in 10 years," Boguth told *Michigan Education Report*.

Part of Edison's plan for Inkster is to directly assess which subject areas need the most work and focus the educational program on fixing these. Edison is requiring Inkster parents, students, and teachers to sign Quarterly Learning Contracts, which, along with narrative report cards, allow teachers to provide ongoing written input on a student's progress rather than just a letter grade. Boguth says the contracts encourage each party in the educational process to "commit to responsibilities."

Included in Edison's five-year contract with Inkster is a guarantee that the number of students who achieve passing reading and math scores on the MEAP test will increase by 3 percent in the first year, with a yearly improvement rate of 5 percent each year after that. It also guarantees that MEAP scores in other subject areas will increase by a total of 10 percent by the end of the five-year contract period.

Edison-Inkster also has implemented a longer school day and school year for the district. Depending on their grade, students attend school seven or eight hours per day, and students are in school three days longer than the typical school year.

Inkster teachers are unhappy with this reform, "The day is too long for all of us, and it really doesn't accomplish much," Geneva Lyles, a science teacher at Inkster Middle School and Inkster Federation of Teachers union representative, recently told

the Detroit News. "We lose the students at the end of the day."

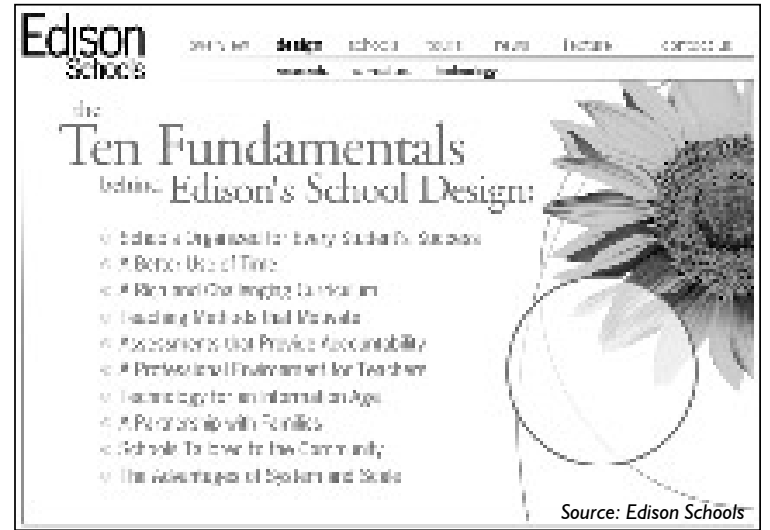
But Edison's teacher training initiative is one of the best improvements made thus far, according to Boguth. The district provides ongoing teacher training through professional development seminars and technology training. All Edison-Inkster teachers have their own laptop computers and are regularly trained on new ways to integrate technology into classroom activities.

Edison-Inkster 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. Boguth says changes in curriculum will focus on improving reading skills and introducing foreign languages in elementary school classes.

Despite the changes that have been made in Inkster's schools, the district still may face state takeover, due to problems with its elected school board. The Detroit Free Press recently reported that Inkster's school board has broken the contract with Edison by acting in a "financially irresponsible" manner.

In taking over the district, Edison agreed to eliminate Inkster's \$1.9-million deficit, and expected board support for future cost-saving measures. But the Free Press investigation shows that Inkster school board members cost the district

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Parent-designed survey to rate teachers meets opposition

School employee labor union calls idea "troubling"

Mark and Mary Tierney, parents of four children in Hazel Park schools, thought they were merely becoming more involved in their children's education. They never anticipated the response they received from school and union officials when they proposed, in December, that their district allow parents to have a role in evaluating teachers.

"It's surprising that someone would suggest we give power for evaluating teacher performance to people we cannot hold accountable," said Mary Ann Ochab, president of the Hazel Park Education Association (HPEA).

The Tierneys have been active parents in their local school district, participating in school events and keeping up with changes in curriculum and administration. Mrs. Tierney, currently a college student studying social work, is president of a local school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

Though the Tierneys are satisfied with the education their children receive at Hazel Park schools, they say the district "can always seek ways to improve."

Their idea for allowing parents to evaluate teachers by means of a survey came from a discussion of school choice in one of Mrs. Tierney's classes. The Tierneys proposed ways the Hazel Park school district could make itself more competitive with surrounding schools in order to lure back students who had left the district through the state's schools-of-choice program.

The problem is serious. Hazel Park Superintendent James Anker recently told

The (Oakland) Daily Tribune, "We lost 357 students over the past three years. Basically they have left the district. I don't really know why."

Overall, Hazel Park schools have lost 475 students since 1994, many going to other districts in search of better schools.



Hazel Park parents Mark and Mary Tierney are happy with their district, but believe greater parental involvement could make it better.

Survey says...

The Tierneys believe that schools must be responsive to parental concerns to remain competitive. They considered ways businesses and other organizations serve customers and developed a proposal that incorporated these ideas.

The proposal included a model survey for parents, based on research Mr. Tierney had conducted on other school districts

around the country that encourage parental input. His survey asks parents to rate the accuracy of statements such as "my child's teacher is available and responds when I call or want to meet" and "the teacher contacts me promptly with concerns about my child's academic or behavior performance."

In the proposal, the Tierneys also included a provision that would allow parental surveys to count for 15 percent of a teacher's yearly evaluation. If a teacher had high marks with parents, this could lead to a financial bonus for that teacher.

Controversy erupts

Mr. Tierney presented his proposal to the Hazel Park school board in December, at a regularly scheduled meeting. Although the board unanimously voted to form a special committee to consider the proposal, controversy erupted.

It was immediately labeled a "merit-pay" issue by school board members and others opposed to the idea—a term that has been demonized in the teaching community—and highlighted as such in news reports in the Detroit Free Press, Detroit News, and other local papers.

This drew immediate fire from state and local teachers' unions. Calvin Mott, a regional representative for the Michigan Education Association (MEA) told the Detroit News the proposal was "troubling."

"We should not allow lay people who have not had training on teacher evaluations to help decide whether a teacher receives a

pay increase," he said.

The Tierneys say the idea of a financial bonus for a high teacher evaluation rating was not the central point of their proposal. They argued that parents should have a greater voice in their children's education, and evaluating teachers was just one way it could be accomplished.

Mark and Mary Tierney approached their community in search of support for their plan. They went door-to-door around Hazel Park, showing people their survey and asking them to sign a public opinion petition in support of the plan. In a few nights they came up with more than 400 signatures; approximately 80 percent of the people they approached signed the petition.

On Feb. 28, the district held a hearing to discuss the proposal. Although those in charge of the meeting had promised to include parents, Mr. Tierney was the only parent allowed to speak who was not a member of the school employees' union or a school official.

The meeting's facilitator, Assistant Superintendent Victor Mayo, also refused to let the meeting be taped by the Tierneys or any other parent in attendance—even though it had been advertised as a public meeting. Mayo held a vote of union members on whether or not the meeting should be taped, though Michigan's Open Meetings Act requires that all public meetings allow both taping and public input. The union members voted against allowing the meeting to be recorded.

Only one other person, Clark Elementary School Principal Michael Barlow, spoke in support of a parental survey, offering his own version that would include questions about school programs and extensive comment sections for parents to write suggestions.

During the meeting, Mr. Tierney told the assembled educators, "We have a good school system, but we can do better, raise our standards. This survey will help us find the 'pulse' of the community. Parents shouldn't have to jump through hoops and cut through bureaucracy to have a voice. If we improve, children stay, and we win."

In response, both HPEA's Ochab and the MEA's Mott pointed out that Tierney's bonus pay option is prevented by the union contract with teachers and would have to be bargained into next year's contract in order to become effective. Both said they opposed merit pay and thought the district was already doing enough to solicit parent input.

Mayo abruptly ended the meeting and said the group would reconvene at the end of March to discuss the two proposed surveys and decide whether or not to proceed. Ochab agreed to convene a special committee to discuss the issue, but the March meeting was postponed indefinitely while the union solidified its recommendation.

"We'll do the best we can, but we certainly can't move mountains," Ochab said.

Following the meeting, a number of parents voiced concern that participants appeared to be "stonewalling" the idea of surveying parents' opinions.

The Tierneys say their experience has taught them a lesson in school politics. Despite consistent talk about increasing parental involvement, the Tierneys believe the opposition to their suggestions shows that parents are "held at arm's-length" from their children's schools.

"You've got parents who feel there's this invisible wall that separates them from their kids' schools. We need to break through that wall. I was hoping this proposal would make that happen," Mark says.

He is currently speaking with board members and parents to offer support for the survey idea at the next meeting, whenever it is scheduled.

The Tierneys say they are willing to drop the bonus pay portion of their proposal, which accounted for 15 percent of a teacher's evaluation, if that's what it takes to get the parents' voices heard. But they believe bonus pay could be an option in the future to inspire teachers and schools to improve.

School board association celebrates two-year anniversary

Congressman, State Board Member call for more parental choice in education

On March 15, U.S. Congressman Pete Hoekstra, R-Holland, and Michigan Board of Education Secretary Mike Warren, Jr. addressed more than 150 school board members, legislators, education reform leaders, and parents at the second anniversary of the Michigan School Board Leaders Association (MSBLA).

Attendees packed the Lansing Sheraton Hotel's banquet room to celebrate the nation's only organization for school board members from public, charter, and private schools. Members have adopted the motto: "School board members are not elected to serve schools; they are elected to ensure that schools serve children and parents."

Congressman Hoekstra encouraged everyone to continue the fight for parental control over education.

"One-third of our kids graduate and still need remedial education. We have a very backward system where we pay and reward people for failure," Hoekstra said. "[We need to] create an environment that is more favorable to choice and puts dollars into the hands of parents. We want to empower parents, local schools, and local school boards. Let the individuals who know the names of our kids decide how to use the money."

Board of Education Secretary Mike Warren also called for choice in education and said technology has tremendously changed the educational landscape.

"The concept of the 'school' is changing," Warren told the audience. "It's the information age; you can learn in your

home. It's time to break up the monopoly. It's time to focus on kids, not schools. We need full choice and full disclosure."

The theme of the evening was a focus on children and the American Dream. The Knapp Knight Singers—students from a local charter school—sang the national anthem and a patriotic medley, and one family with six home-schooled children recited a poem.

MSBLA Executive Director Lori Yaklin remarked that the organization has grown above and beyond anyone's expectations, bringing together public, charter, private, and home school leaders from around the state to advance choice in education.

"Tonight we celebrate the fact that, as Americans, we have the freedom to achieve our dreams, yet we mourn for the many children whose lack of a quality education stifles their opportunities," Yaklin said. "MSBLA was created two years ago with these children in mind."

She said MSBLA's goal was to improve education for all children through the traditionally American ideas of freedom, competition, and choice, adding that "an educated populace is necessary to create and preserve prosperity and liberty."

MSBLA Chairman and Founder Tom Bowles, who recently retired from the Van Buren board of education, also addressed the audience, offering a defense of educational choice and exhorting reform advocates to continue their work in this area.

Three individuals were recognized



U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra of Holland joined Lori Yaklin, executive director of Michigan School Board Leaders Association, to celebrate the organization's second anniversary.

for their efforts to improve education for Michigan children.

Chairman and founder of National Heritage Academies J.C. Huizenga was honored with the "Visionary Award" for his founding and support of 22 charter schools in Michigan and five others around the country.

Arvon Township Board of Education members Mary Rogala and Jim Harden were presented with "Courage in Leadership" Awards. Rogala and Harden were honored for their crusade to save their tiny, 10-student district from a financial crisis in the face of union efforts to thwart education reform.

Redford

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teachers.” According to the Mackinac Center, Michigan ranks last in the nation in terms of limiting public education overhead. Only 46 percent of Michigan public education employees are teachers. Other states place as much as 63 percent of their public education employees in the classroom.

Under the proposal, the Mackinac Center would work with the district—free of charge—to evaluate the current costs of non-instructional services, draft requests for proposals (RFPs) from private vendors, ensure an open and competitive bidding process, and evaluate bids. The district would be required to accept bids from reputable firms that met the specifications of the RFP and resulted in cost savings. If a \$350,000 savings was not realized, the Mackinac Center would pay the difference up to the entire \$350,000 required to restore the teachers’ positions or otherwise lower the student-to-teacher ratio.

“Increasingly, the challenge in public education is not the overall amount we are spending, but how it is being spent,” said Overton. “With parents sacrificing to raise additional money for the district, the least we can do is assure that current school resources are being spent wisely.”

As of late April, the district was still considering the proposal. “Unfortunately, Redford has not accepted our offer yet,” Overton said. “The primary opponents of outsourcing non-instructional services are the school employee labor unions—and Redford is a stronghold for the Michigan Education Association. The irony is that the union—which purports to represent the best interests of teachers—is more than likely preventing us from saving teachers’ jobs.”

Overton cited the union’s recently published 2001-2002 “Quality Education Agenda” that opposes the privatization of transportation, cafeteria, and janitorial services, even when outsourcing improves quality and provides more money for teachers. Currently, Redford does not contract out for any of these services.

Other districts, however, do. One example is the Mt. Pleasant School District,

which was losing \$200,000 every year by providing its own school lunch service. After contracting with a private lunch provider, the district saved \$113,000 in the first year—and the company retained all but one of the school employees.

Opponents of privatization worry that outsourcing efforts will threaten school employees’ jobs or reduce the quality of services. Yet, privatization contracts are often written in such a way to mandate the hiring of current employees by the outside company. The downside of this technique is that it can limit the amount of savings derived from outsourcing.

In an April 1 editorial, The Detroit News called on Redford Union to accept the Mackinac Center’s offer, saying, “If a better education can be provided by competitively bidding some non-classroom jobs, then that’s a route the district owes its parents and students to explore.”

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Rogala

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employees to work in the district if they chose to do so. The resulting savings would be used to fund a new \$20,000 science, music, art, foreign language, and technology program. Board members were unanimously in favor of this plan, said Rogala.

Then the trouble began. “The union did everything it could to prevent us from going through with the School Excellence Plan,” Rogala said. “The MEA served us with numerous grievances and an order to appear in court.”

option for public schools, even when it can be shown to provide substantial savings for the district,” Mackinac Center Senior Vice President Joseph Overton said in his introduction of Rogala at the Lansing speech.

The MEA’s position is ironic in light of the union’s outsourcing of custodial, mailing, security, and cafeteria services at its East Lansing headquarters, said Overton.

The audience included representatives from the MEA, attorneys from its law firm, and officials from its insurance affiliate,



Arvon Township school board president Mary Rogala tells an interviewer of her fight with a local union over budget priorities for her tiny, 10-student district. See the six-minute video at www.mackinac.org.

The union publicly stated that it believed private service providers couldn’t do as good a job as unionized employees, even though many Michigan school districts have improved service quality and saved education dollars by contracting out, said Rogala.

After the board approved the plan by a 3-to-2 vote, one board member called a special meeting to rescind his yes vote following a series of threats against his person and business, Rogala said. The plan’s defeat led to the scrapping of the \$20,000 educational program and the reduction of the school library fund down from \$5,000 to \$300.

“The MEA has adopted the reactionary position that outsourcing is *never* a good

the Michigan Education Special Services Association (MESSA).

During a question-and-answer period, Rogala listened as Tom Baird, an MEA attorney, disputed her story. Baird’s law firm filed numerous lawsuits against the Arvon school board during the ordeal, accusing the district of violating labor practices by considering outsourcing and hiring a teacher to serve as an administrator.

The MEA “is willing to cooperate with the board and consider positive changes,” Baird said, but wished the board had not held meetings over the summer, when most people are on vacation.

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LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Bill may impose testing on home-schoolers

A bill recently introduced in the Michigan House would require home-school students to take the MEAP test and submit their scores to the state.

The bill, H.B. 4521, was sponsored by Rep. Michael Switalski, D-Roseville.

The bill faces strong opposition from Michigan home-schoolers and the national Home School Legal Defense Association, who say the bill infringes on parental rights and imposes unnecessary regulations on home-schoolers.

The bill was referred to the House Education Committee in late March.

Changes to special education rules

The Michigan Department of Education has proposed significant changes to the rules governing special education services in public schools.

Many of the changes were first

recommended seven years ago by a state Special Education Task Force. They are intended to reduce overlap between state and federal special education regulations, and give intermediate school districts more freedom to decide which programs they will provide to students.

The Department has held 10 hearings around the state to allow the public to submit comments on the proposed changes. The department's web site also includes information on the changes and opportunities for public comment at www.mde.state.mi.us/off/sped.

Dept. of Ed. increases accreditation standards

Standards developed by the state Department of Education increased the number of unaccredited schools in Michigan from eight to more than 600 public schools. Penalties for not meeting state accreditation standards may include state takeover or closure of some schools.

Accreditation is based on how well

students perform on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests. New standards, adopted in 1999, require that at least one-quarter of a school's students pass the MEAP reading, math, and science exams for the institution to receive accreditation. Schools that do not pass that threshold on all three tests in 2000 will be "unaccredited."

The former accreditation standards only required half of a school's students to pass only one of the exams over a three-year period.

The new, higher threshold is expected to remove accreditation from one in every five of Michigan's 3,128 local schools.

Coming soon: "pop-free" school zones?

A recently suggested bill may ban pop and other sugary soft drinks from being sold in Michigan elementary and middle schools.

State Rep. Virgil Bernero, D-Lansing, decided to write a bill when his 13-year-old daughter told him she occasionally skips

milk at lunch in the school cafeteria in favor of soda pop. Bernero told The Detroit News he was appalled when he found that many schools in the area sell soft drinks from vending machines or in the lunchrooms.

"It's pervasive," the first-term Democrat told The News. "Kids are substituting pop for milk—and that has devastating health consequences. They're dismissed after quality health education programs to lunchrooms filled with junk."

The bill would also require high schools to refrain from selling pop until late in the school day, well after the lunch hour.

Angela Nicoll, a parent and Livonia homemaker, told The News she thinks the bill is unnecessary.

"It's a good idea in that kids really shouldn't drink that much pop," she said. "But it's a bad idea because here is government again getting involved in personal decisions. If you don't want your kids drinking pop, tell them not to."

School shootings prompt response in legislatures

Michigan may consider "anti-bully" measures

Prompted by a recent wave of school shootings, Michigan and other states are considering legislation to curb school violence.

The most recent acts of violence, school shootings in California and Pennsylvania, left two dead and 19 injured. There have been over a dozen school

And last year in Michigan, 6-year-old Kayla Rolland was shot and killed by a classmate at Mount Morris Township's Buell Elementary School.

Legislators and community leaders are looking for ways to put an end to school violence, from introducing more police and metal detectors in schools to

Detroit News. "Every school has [bullies]. When you put hundreds of kids together, some will push their weight around. Most kids in this situation lack self-esteem. They aren't getting it from home. That's why they become bullies."

New Hampshire recently instituted a law that allows local school boards to create anti-bullying policies and provide disciplinary procedures for students who subject others to "insults, taunts or challenges, whether verbal or physical in nature." In Massachusetts, the state allocated \$1 million in federal funds for anti-bullying programs, and Washington State and Colorado are considering bills that would require districts to adopt anti-bullying policies.

Michigan Rep. Buzz Thomas, D-Detroit, may introduce a similar bill that would require public schools to establish bully prevention programs; yet, many state legislators say anti-bullying legislation is unnecessary in Michigan, since strong laws regarding school violence are already on the books.

State Senate Majority Leader Joanne Emmons, R-Big Rapids, a former teacher who chaired a 1999 safe schools task force, recently told The News she believes anti-bullying legislation would simply be redundant.

Current Michigan law provides that students in grade six or above can be

suspended or expelled by the local school board for up to 180 days—almost the entire school year—if they commit a physical assault at school.

The law also states that a student's "gross misdemeanor or persistent disobedience," as determined by a local principal or official, can be reason for suspension or expulsion. Students who carry guns or commit arson or criminal sexual conduct on school grounds can face stricter penalties.

In April, the Michigan State Police established a school violence hotline where students can report threats or suspicious behavior. The hotline allows students, teachers, and parents from public or private schools to anonymously report information; calls are forwarded to the appropriate local agencies for action.

"The message that we really want to send is prevention," Donald Weatherspoon, the Michigan Department of Education's safety director, recently told The News. "Our children need to be able to communicate in a way that gives them confidence that someone is listening and that someone will act."

School Violence Hotline

1-800-815-TIPS

Michigan students and teachers in public or private elementary and high school and colleges are encouraged to use the hotline to anonymously report suspicious or threatening behavior.

•911 should still be used in cases of immediate danger.

shooting incidents in the last three years, and Michigan schools have not been immune to the violence trend.

Michigan schools have faced a rash of bomb threats in the last two years, particularly since the 1999 Columbine school shooting in Colorado, where two students, armed with guns and explosives, killed 13 and injured 23 before committing suicide.

student-led "kindness programs."

Many states see anti-bullying legislation as the next step in school violence prevention, since many of the perpetrators in violent incidents have been students who were teased or threatened by others.

"It's something we all have to address," Ken Madeleine, an elementary principal in Fraser, recently told The

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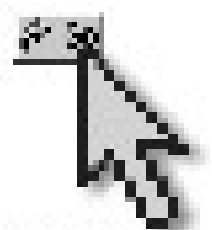
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Public school eases immigrant's transition

Hispanic student chooses Detroit's McMillan Multicultural

Sixth-grader Rito Bueno spoke only Spanish when his family moved from Mexico to Michigan less than three years ago. But today he speaks fluent English—thanks, in many respects, to the efforts of the teachers and staff at the James B. McMillan Dual Multicultural School in Detroit.

Rito came to Michigan when his father decided it would be the best place to raise his family. Mr. Bueno worked in the United States as a teenager but returned to Mexico to get married and have children. The family then relocated to Michigan in 1998.

The Buenos chose, under the district's choice program, to send Rito to the McMillan school because of its bilingual instructor and the good reputation of the school in the community. Although the Buenos live closer to Beard Elementary School, Rito is more than happy to walk the nearly three miles to attend McMillan each day, if necessary. "I love my school," he says.

Rito particularly likes McMillan because of the caring teachers. "They are always willing to help me if I have trouble understanding a word," he says. "I can talk to them like a friend."

Ms. Marroquin, Rito's bilingual education teacher, considers it "a delight and privilege" to teach at a school that serves a diverse community. "As an ESL [English as a Second Language] teacher, I have the opportunity to eradicate the cultural and language barriers faced by students who speak Spanish as their first language," she



Sixth-grader Rito Bueno has gone from knowing almost no English to becoming fluent in the language while also excelling in other subjects.

says.

McMillan principal Wesley Ganson describes Rito as a dedicated student who loves to learn. "Rito is truly a joy to have

as a student," he says.

Last summer, Rito attended the Summer Learning Academy, a program instituted by former Detroit Public Schools

CEO David Adamany to assist struggling students. The academy helped Rito improve in the areas of reading, math, and science.

Rito's favorite class is math. But he also enjoys playing the trumpet in the band with his teacher, Harold Monte.

"Rito is a very hard-working young man that is definitely not afraid of a challenge," says Monte. "He is not the kind of student that makes excuses. He makes teaching a pleasurable experience."

When Rito isn't studying, the soft-spoken 11-year-old spends his time at a local boxing club. A champion of the Silver Gloves division with a record of 11 wins and 2 losses, Rito hopes to become a professional boxer.

McMillan serves many students of Hispanic origin. This provides opportunities for all the school's children to experience a different culture. Recently, the school hosted a celebration of Mexican culture. Principal Ganson believes this is a key component of the educational process at McMillan. "It is very important for our students to understand the culture and background of their classmates," he says. "It is great for students to hear from Rito what Mexico is like and his cultural traditions."

Ganson hopes to eventually take students on a field trip to Mexico to experience the country firsthand. Until then, Ganson, his school, and Rito will continue to bring a little bit of Mexico to Detroit.

TEACHER FOCUS

"It's all about the children"

Public school principal makes a difference for students

Wesley Ganson says he was well aware of the challenges he would face once he accepted the principal's position at James B. McMillan Dual Multicultural School. McMillan, a public K-8 school in the heart of Detroit, was dealing with myriad problems, including a neglected 106-year-old building and declining enrollment.

"My friends were concerned about my decision," recalls Ganson. "They wondered if I really understood what I was getting into."

Today, no one doubts that Ganson has a firm grasp of what needs to be done for the children at McMillan. From the beginning, he believed he could provide the dynamic leadership needed to turn the school around and make McMillan an oasis of hope for the community.

"I graduated from Detroit Public Schools. What better way to come back to the community and serve?" he says. "I believe that you can graduate from a Detroit public school, and you can go on and get your degrees. You can make something out of yourself."

McMillan is now considered one of the best schools in the area. The reputation of the teachers and Principal Ganson continues to attract students far beyond the school's geographic boundaries. Many parents are pulling their children out of schools that are right across the street from them to take them miles away to McMillan.

Since Ganson took the helm three years ago, McMillan's enrollment has increased from 287 to nearly 400 students. Approximately one-third of the students come from outside the school's district-assigned boundaries. This growth is quite an achievement, considering Detroit Public Schools have lost approximately 19,000 students in the last few years to public

and public charter schools in surrounding districts.

Ganson describes McMillan as being in "deplorable" condition when he arrived. But he seized the opportunity to involve the community in restoring the historic school building. Along with help from parents, he organized a major "beautification" effort, repainting the school inside and out and cleaning up the fields around the school. Ganson also encouraged nearby corporations to donate playground equipment and school supplies. And last summer, the Detroit City Council designated the school as a local historic district.

Much of McMillan's success is related to Ganson's ability to handpick his staff. "A school must share a common vision. In order to be effective, everyone in the school—from teachers to support staff—must work together as a team. And we've been able to accomplish that here," he says.

More than half of the teachers at McMillan have been brought in during Ganson's tenure. The staff boasts many male teachers (a rarity in elementary schools) and is reflective of the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the students. Most important, however, is the fact that the teaching staff shares a strong commitment to educating the children and serving the community.

"It's all about the children. I do everything for these kids that I would want someone to do for my children," says Ganson, whose four children attend Detroit Public Schools.

McMillan parents agree. It was that commitment that drew Donna Goines and her six children to the school.

"Mr. Ganson knows what I expect of him and I know what he expects of me as a parent. We work together to get our



Principal Wes Ganson has engineered such a turnaround at Detroit's McMillan Dual Multicultural School that parents from outside the school's district-assigned boundaries are clamoring to get their children enrolled.

children the best education—me and Mr. Ganson as a team," says Goines.

She adds that Ganson is a great role model for students. "He truly cares about the kids. While other principals we've dealt with act like, 'I'm here for my paycheck,' Mr. Ganson is here for the kids. The kids are proud of him. I'm proud of him."

Ganson considers parental involvement a key ingredient for McMillan's success. Many changes in the school were designed to encourage parental participation in the children's education. The school now offers ongoing parenting and stress management classes, numerous before-

and after-school activities for children and parents, and a number of field trips and programs for parents to participate in.

One day, Ganson hopes that his efforts will encourage parents to be more actively engaged in caring for and educating their children. "We can't replace parents. We can only partner with them in raising their children."

McMillan's "partner" approach has also attracted teachers to the school. Holly Koscielniak—or "Ms. K" as her students call her—is a second-grade teacher who says McMillan's approach was the major factor in her decision to come there.

"This school is very welcoming and open to parents," she says. "Parental involvement is very important. I cannot teach these kids alone. I need the support of the parents. We need to work together as a team."

Ganson has not only done amazing things inside the school, but has reached out to the community to build relationships and solicit support. Through his efforts, companies including Ford and Chrysler have donated toys for needy children at Christmas, shades for the windows in the school building, and computers. He also is hoping to establish a "multicultural corporate partnership" program that would allow some children to travel to other countries on field trips.

Principal Ganson is proud of the students, parents, school staff, and supportive community and looks forward to continuing to make the school the best possible learning environment in the area.

"Every day, when I walk out of here, I'm exhausted," he says. "But I feel good knowing I made a difference."

Education tops agenda in Lansing and Washington

School choice measure included in federal bill

The 2000 campaign season was filled with promises for education reform, which consistently tops the list of most important issues to voters. How likely is it that Michigan will see any follow-through on education reform by state legislators in Lansing and the new administration in Washington?

Here in Michigan, one of the biggest question marks is whether the current cap on the number of charter schools that can be sponsored by universities will be raised to meet an ever-increasing demand. In the Legislature's last session, the House of Representatives failed to pass a bill that would have raised the cap, which stands at 150 university-sponsored schools.

Republicans generally support charters, and Republicans have control of Michigan's House and Senate by wide margins. So why the logjam?



Legislators in Michigan's capital set policies for Michigan's public schools.

"I'll tell you why we don't have more charters," House Education Committee Chair Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, told *Michigan Education Report*. "The Michigan Education Association is the only reason we don't have more charters."

Rep. David Woodward, D-Madison Heights, agreed, "The reason we don't have more charters is, simply, the MEA."

The 157,000-member Michigan Education Association is the state's largest school employee labor union and a powerful lobbying force in Lansing. It strongly opposes charters and other forms of school



President George W. Bush's education plan is being criticized by both anti-school choice groups as well as organizations who fear further federal intrusion into the local control of schools.

choice and has succeeded so far in keeping lawmakers from expanding the scope of a reform many Michigan parents want. Senate Majority Leader Dan DeGrow, R-Port Huron, says the best hope right

now is for raising the charter cap in school districts judged as "failing."

But the trouble comes with how to define what constitutes failure. That is something the Senate will have to decide

in order to establish a standard for deciding whether and when the state should intervene in the affairs of a school district, as it did in 1999 in the case of Detroit Public Schools.

Legislators held three public hearings in February to hear testimony from educators, parents, and other citizens on how the "failure standard" should be drawn. While some said MEAP scores should be the determining factor and some said graduation rates—or both—others expressed concern that the state's attempt to codify failure is misguided.

Matthew Brouillette, director of education policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, told the committee to approach the problem from a different angle.

"Instead of asking, 'What constitutes a failing district,' we ought to be asking 'Who should determine what constitutes failure?'" Brouillette said. "I submit that parents are best equipped to determine whether or not a school is failing to educate their children. It is parents who have their children's best interests in mind, not politicians or school officials."

"Each child is a unique individual—what works for one may not work for another," he added. "Therefore, the most appropriate definition of a 'failing district' is one where parents cannot choose what is best for their children."

The hearings were held in part as a response to intense criticism of the Legislature's attempt to take over Benton Harbor's schools, an attempt which critics said did not apply the same standards as were applied to Detroit schools.

The Senate Education Committee is expected to draft a bill addressing the issue of failing schools for submission to the full Senate by the end of April.

Federal role to expand

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., President Bush is promoting an education plan many expected to relinquish aspects of federal control over education to states. Instead, the president's plan seeks to increase federal funding and direction for education through myriad initiatives.

His plan includes mandatory student proficiency testing in the third through eighth grades, vouchers for students in failing schools, savings accounts for K-12 education, and greater funding for reading programs, charter schools, character educa-

EDUCATION continued on page 8

Focus on educating children, says new education chief

Secretary Paige: Leave non-instructional services to others

President George Bush's appointment of Roderick Paige as the seventh U.S. Secretary of Education was applauded by education reform proponents and the public school establishment alike.

Paige, a committed public education advocate who supports the president's plan for standardized testing and increased federal funding for education, was easily confirmed by the Senate on Jan. 20.

But the new secretary is best known for his work as a member of the Houston Independent School District (HISD) Board of Education, and later as HISD superintendent.

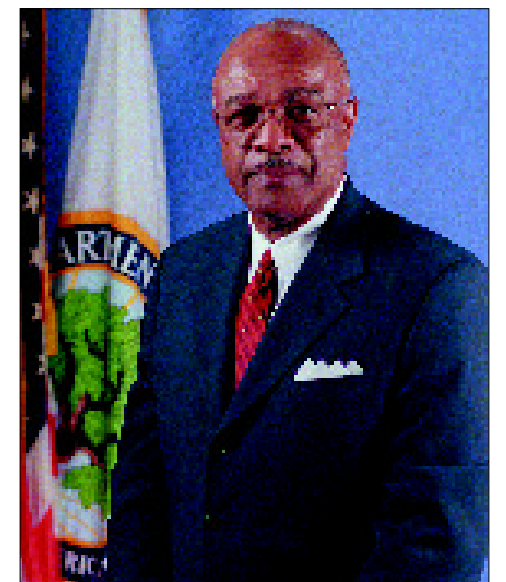
As a board member from 1989 to 1994, Paige left his mark on HISD. He co-authored the school board's Declaration of Beliefs and Visions, a statement that called for dramatic reform and a commitment to decentralization, accountability, and the development of a core curriculum. This document became the foundation for a dynamic restructuring of HISD, which

included outsourcing school services; incorporating input from business, religious, civic, and other leaders into school reform plans; and allowing principals more autonomy to run their schools. Reforms also included performance-based pay plans for principals, administrators, and even for Paige himself.

One of his fellow HISD board members, Donald McAdams, described Paige as "the heart and soul of our commitment to school reform." McAdams, in his book "Fighting to Save Our Urban Schools...and Winning! Lessons from Houston," writes that Paige "must have always been an intellectual. He read and seemed to remember everything about education reform. In fact, he seemed to read and remember everything about everything."

Paige explained some of his HISD efforts in a November 2000 Education Week commentary this way:

Some of the courageous decisions [we] have made involved



New Secretary of Education Rod Paige is credited with turning Houston Independent School District into a model for inner-city educational reform.

recognizing our limitations. The school district runs the city's largest transportation system, but none of us professional educators knows much about how to keep buses run-

PAIGE continued on page 8

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Education

continued from page 7

tion, and technology.

Bush's proposal includes a measure to establish a federal school choice fund, which would allow the Secretary of Education to research, develop, and disseminate information on innovative school choice programs.

The Bush plan also offers a provision to allow public schools to evolve into charter schools. The provision would let states or individual school districts enter into a charter agreement with the Secretary of Education. As with all charter schools, this arrangement would allow officials more autonomy in financial matters, staffing, and curriculum, with fewer state and federal regulations. Parents would have more choices as to which school their children could attend, and schools could attract parents by setting and meeting performance goals.

Along with his education plan, Bush proposed a \$1.6 billion, 8-percent increase in federal funding for K-12 education, as part of an overall \$4.6 billion spending boost for the U.S. Department of Education.

Critics of the president's plan include teachers' unions—which oppose the voucher and school choice initiatives—and other groups that warn against a greater federal role in education.

The Mackinac Center's Matthew Brouillette recently told CNS News that Bush "probably doesn't see the long-term impact of involving the federal government [more in education]. Despite what might be laudable efforts to implement more market incentives into the public system from the federal level, this is just a usurpation of power that belongs to the states."

Congress has yet to consider Bush's proposal. But the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee did recently review the plan, naming it the "Better Education for Students and Teachers (BEST) Act." The committee approved most of Bush's initiatives, including a \$5 billion increase in funding for reading programs, but removed the voucher component in an attempt to avoid controversial issues and partisan conflict.

The U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce also recently proposed an education bill that mirrors Bush's plan. The bill, titled the "No Child Left Behind Act" of 2001, was sponsored by Committee Chairman John Boehner, R-Ohio, and more than 70 original co-sponsors.

It includes many of the measures contained in Bush's original education proposal including assessment testing, and a provision to provide school vouchers to children in

failing and "unsafe" schools. The bill also provides immunity from federal liability for teachers and other school officials who "engage in reasonable actions to maintain school discipline" and ensure school safety.

"H.R. 1 will give students a chance, parents a choice, and schools a charge to be the best in the world," Boehner said. "The hard lesson of the past is that money alone cannot be the vehicle for change in our schools. If our goal truly is to leave no child behind, there must be accountability for results."

The House and Senate are likely to

form a joint committee to hammer out the details of the final combined education plan.

Republicans say they will fight for the voucher option when the final education plan heads to the House and Senate floors, but Democrats believe they have the votes to defeat it.



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Paige

continued from page 7

ning. Nor do schools of education offer courses in food service, building maintenance, and waste disposal. So we hired people who understand these industries, paid competitive wages, and authorized them to draw up contracts with the best firms they could find. That allowed us to concentrate on what we could do best: educate children.

Paige says the district's efforts to solicit community support and input were "grounded in the conviction that every member of the public is our 'customer,' including people with no children in school and parents who send their children elsewhere or teach them at home."

Paige became the superintendent of

HISD in 1994. As superintendent, he expanded school choice by launching a system of charter schools, ended "social promotion," and established programs that encouraged school and student accountability.

In Education Week, Paige explained the district's support of decentralization: "We understand that the real work of a school system is what happens in classrooms and schools. So we decentralized management and made the individual school the basic unit of accountability and improvement."

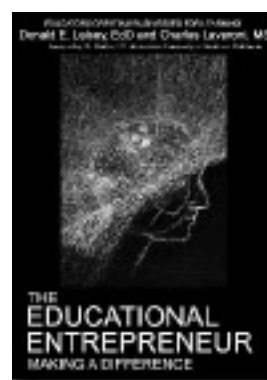
Urban school officials around the country are praising Paige's appointment as Secretary of Education, and many hope that Paige's commitment to accountability and reform will carry over into his work on a national level.

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COMMENTARY

School choice: Good for teachers



Michael Corliss

Mr. Corliss, a member of the Michigan Education Association, teaches at Stevenson High School in Livonia and is part of Teachers for Choice, a network of teachers

advocating for greater parental choice in education. For more information, visit www.TeachersForChoice.org.

The defeat of voucher proposals in Michigan and California last year owes much to the efforts of teachers' unions, who devoted considerable resources to opposing them—and to convincing many of their members that school choice is bad for educators.

However, dire union warnings that allowing parents more educational options would spell the end of public schools failed to convince the 1.2 million voters who voted for vouchers anyway. This is a strong constituency of people who believe greater school choice will actually *improve* education. And as for teachers, there are many reasons to believe that choice will benefit them, too. Let's look at the arguments.

Critics of school choice charge that allowing more students to leave the public schools will result in teachers being laid off or becoming unemployed. But a moment's thought reveals the flaw in this argument. Demand for teachers will not decrease just

because more parents choose to send their children to different schools. And these different schools are likely to be in the same general area of the schools the students are leaving. So if jobs are lost at the old school as a result of a mass student exodus, the new school will still need to hire teachers to meet the demand.

There's even the possibility greater school choice would result in *more* jobs for teachers. How? As competition among schools intensifies, administrators will need to come up with ways to attract more students. One of the selling points many schools would likely employ is that of smaller class size. As more schools offered smaller classes as an incentive to parents, more teachers would be needed to keep the instructor-to-pupil ratios low.

Another claim of school choice critics is that choice will necessitate many changes that are disruptive to the educational process. True, but that's a good thing. Here's why: Teachers are used to adapting to new situations. They have a new batch of students every year, sometimes twice a year. They adapt to innovative teaching methods and ideas all the time. Sometimes this happens formally, with training and in-service, but more often it is done informally. A teacher picks up a new idea from another teacher, a magazine article, a graduate class, a parent, or a student. The "disruptions" caused by school choice will only enrich this "cross-fertilization" of ideas, to the benefit of students.

But how is all this change good for educators? First, it allows them to improve

and do their jobs better. Second, most teachers will agree that new ideas and new situations are what make their jobs exciting and fun. Too many experienced teachers can tell stories of how they've been pressured, if not intimidated, into altering or abandoning something they believed in because of bureaucratic interference.

In a school that must compete for customers, that will change. Monopolies—such as the current system—can afford to ignore their employees' ideas, but enterprises facing stiff competition cannot. When school choice forces schools to listen to the teachers, that means teachers will be able to guide the changes that will inevitably occur. No longer will they be excluded from decisions about curriculum, teaching methods, allocation of resources, and the like. Competitive schools will have to abandon the "top-down" bureaucratic decision-making process and consult teachers, because teachers know the answers. Teachers are the ones who are in contact with the students and parents. They read the research and take the graduate courses. They share ideas and insights with each other. Schools that ignore the resource they have in teachers will do so at their peril, because there will be other, better schools willing to give teachers the respect they deserve in the pursuit of improved education.

Finally, critics argue that school choice will mean pay cuts for teachers. But that is an unlikely scenario for two reasons. First, the private sector almost always pays more than the public sector: That is the primary

method businesses must employ to attract and keep the best people. Don't believe it? Just ask any public-sector lawyer, doctor, or other professional how much more he could make in private practice. Second, with school choice, money will follow the students. What this means is that parents who can afford several thousand dollars a year in tuition under a voucher or tax credit plan will suddenly be in the private school market. A lot of that new money will go to teachers, as competing schools scramble to attract and retain the best educators they can find. This isn't simply theory: At least one study, conducted in 1998 by researchers at Ohio University, found that teacher salaries go up as competition increases.

Teachers do not need to fear school choice. The evidence shows that it will benefit them as well as their students.

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“Reading Recovery” is no such thing



Nora Chahbazi

Nora Chahbazi is the owner and director of the Ounce of Prevention Reading Center in Flushing.

Reading Recovery, a support program for struggling first-grade readers, is currently riding high on a wave of success. Originally established in New Zealand over 20 years ago, the program has since taken the United States by storm. Nationwide, over 3,450 districts have implemented Reading Recovery for their students, while 230 of Michigan's districts use it to help children read. Unfortunately, however, Reading Recovery's "success" is less a function of how well children are being taught to read than it is of the program's ability to attract government funding.

How does the program work? When implemented according to guidelines, Reading Recovery attempts to bring the lowest-scoring 20 percent of a school's first-grade students up to their school's average reading level. Extensively trained veteran teachers instruct four to 16 students per year, working with them one-on-one for 30 minutes, five days a week for a total of 60 to 100 sessions. Lessons include reading and re-reading books containing predictable text, cutting up and rearranging self-written sentences, letter identification, and introduction to new books.

Students are taught to rely on context to predict words and learn strategies that include guessing words, looking at a picture to figure out text, or using a similar word in place of the word written (e.g., backpack for book bag.) They are sometimes encouraged to use the sound for the first letter in a word as a clue to what the word may be. Though decades of scientific research have shown that phonemic awareness—the ability to hear and remember all sounds in words—is most predictive of reading skills and learning an alphabetic writing system, this focus is largely absent in Reading Recovery instruction.

Reading Recovery uses an “Observation Survey,” a subjective, nonstandardized method that tests students by using the same books read and exercises practiced during remedial training. This method not only is far less likely than a standardized test using new materials to predict reading proficiency, it also defies objective analysis, since its results can't be accurately compared with the reading test results of other, similar programs.

This opens Reading Recovery to critics' suspicion that its developers are reluctant to have their program's efficacy evaluated objectively. Indeed, Marie Clay, developer of both Reading Recovery and the Observation Survey, emphasizes the importance of “systematic observation” of pupils' reading behavior over standardized testing, which all peer review journals and education experts rely upon in order to compare and contrast data from one study to another. Perhaps worst of all, only results from

students who finish the program go into the calculation of reading proficiency gains. This means that the outcomes for the 41 percent of children who start the program but never finish are not taken into account when Reading Recovery reports on its own performance. In other words, the program's reported gains in reading proficiency are highly suspect.

Another problem with Reading Recovery is that the program is often overly expensive. A variety of reports and studies show the cost ranging from \$4,625 to \$9,200 per successful student per year, while the average cost to provide a full year of education to a child in Michigan's public schools is \$6,500.

Defenders of the program, however, insist the high price is worth paying because it prevents the need for future intervention. But reports show students released from Reading Recovery often read so poorly that they qualify for other remedial reading programs. A study from Wake County Schools in North Carolina revealed that Reading Recovery students were just as likely as those in a control group to be retained, placed in special education, or served by federal programs for poorly performing students one year later.

In fact, a 1999 report published by Massey University in New Zealand showed that one year after completing the program, reading ability of Reading Recovery graduates “was around one year below age-appropriate levels.” The same report, which tracked 152 students for three years, also states, “Reading Recovery failed to

significantly improve the literacy development of children considered to have succeeded in the program.” Similarly, a 1995 study commissioned by the Ohio State Board of Education and conducted over a four-year period, found that while Reading Recovery graduates showed initial gains in reading proficiency, “the average score advantage was not maintained at the end of 2nd grade,” nor was it retained on “tests for 3rd and 4th grade.”

Parents notice when their children aren't being helped. Two Michigan parents, Scott and Tracy Bayliss, have a son who graduated from a Reading Recovery program and is now in the fifth grade. “We are still waiting for him to recover from Reading Recovery,” they say. They have recently sought help outside their school system because their son continues to struggle and to get poor reading grades. His district no longer uses Reading Recovery. Another parent, a teacher herself, stated flatly of her child's Reading Recovery experience: “It was the worst thing we ever did.”

In Michigan alone, over \$600 million per year is spent on remedial training for high school graduates who lack basic skills, such as reading. Michigan's education system can't afford the luxury of experimenting on children year after year with programs whose efficacy hasn't been adequately determined through comparison studies and solid research.

Inkster, con't.

continued from page 2

\$66,000 by refusing to approve a contract with an outside vendor to provide food services to Inkster schools.

According to the Free Press, board members also spent over \$10,000 in travel expenses for out-of-state education conferences, despite a district moratorium on out-of-state travel, and refused to document many of the expenditures with receipts. The Free Press investigation also found that, of the receipts submitted for school board members' trips, many were for lavishly high-priced meals and other questionable expenses.

Despite these and other negative developments, Inkster School Board President John T. Rucker, in a recent newsletter, commended the improvements Edison has made in the district and mentioned the board's commitment to saving money.

“We are dedicated to continuing the improvement of Inkster Public Schools.... We accept our obligation to be fiscally responsible and are continuing to seek

new ways to operate our schools more economically,” Rucker wrote.

State officials will interfere with the district only if problems continue with the school board, or if Edison requests state assistance.

Elsewhere in Michigan

Despite the debate over Edison's involvement and success in education, the rapid growth of Edison Schools and the company's innovative programs seem to have encouraged parents, teachers, and school districts to consider options beyond the traditional model for public education. Educational management companies such as Edison are becoming more prevalent and are drawing support from parents and activists looking for bolder reform ideas in education.

For more information on Edison Schools, visit the company's web site at www.edisonschools.com.

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TeachersforChoice



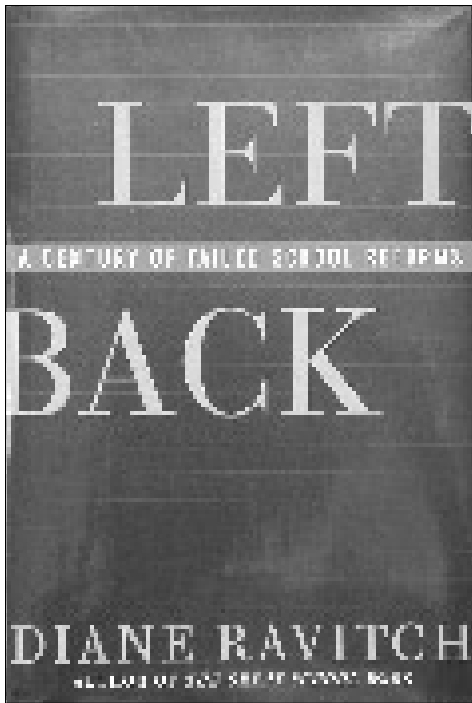
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TeachersforChoice is a network of public school teachers working to improve education for children and teachers in Michigan.

TeachersforChoice.org

Pulling down the edifice of knowledge



**“Left Back:
A Century of Failed School Reforms”**
by Diane Ravitch
Simon & Schuster, 2000
555 pages

Reviewed by Samuel Walker

“It is time to renew the academic tradition for the children of the twenty-first century.” —Diane Ravitch

For decades, bits and pieces of the history of how America’s educational crisis came about have trickled out to the public, sometimes from dubious sources, with little in the way of authoritative credibility to pull the whole picture together. In her new book, “Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms,” education historian and policy analyst Diane Ravitch has compiled a genuine history, accessible to the average reader, of just what happened to cause

America’s educational meltdown.

Ravitch’s thesis is simple, but hard to grasp in its full implications. It is that beginning early in the 20th century, possessed by what they thought were visionary notions, education reformers began systematically to abandon the old, classical academic curriculum—“the systematic study of language and literature, science and mathematics, history, the arts and foreign languages”—in favor of a pragmatic, utilitarian model aimed at “social efficiency.”

Ravitch correctly points out that the current dispute over standards and testing is simply another flare-up of the same century-old debate over the relevancy to modern life of the classic, liberal arts curriculum. Ultimately, the line in the battle over education in America is drawn between “knowledge for general intelligence” and “education for utility.” Choose one or the other and you set in motion radically different educational programs, one which proved successful for centuries, the other which has proved a dismal, universal failure.

Is knowledge we can “use” the only knowledge worthy of pursuit? Or does that knowledge emerge from a wider reservoir that takes in the philosophical, the transcendent—or the poetical and artistic—in addition to the temporal and the scientific? Is education for vocation—getting a job—or is vocation merely one of many purposes served by learning once order is imposed on the wide range of knowledge? These are the questions that lurk in the background of the debate over American education in the 20th century, and whisper from behind every page of Ravitch’s book.

“Education for utility” is the term Ravitch uses to describe a revolutionary overthrow of centuries of experience in learning; a revolution that placed unprecedented authority in the hands of academic “experts” less concerned with the content of what was taught, and more concerned about “new” and “progressive” methods

they could devise for consumption by the masses.

Thus began the deterioration of expertise in subject matter too characteristic of today’s teaching profession, and the phenomenon of faddishness with regard to teaching methods, promoted by a “pedagogical profession” that dominates today’s education establishment. As this new profession was consolidating itself, it attracted those seeking to “liberate” children from traditional liberal arts learning, and teacher’s colleges became “seedbeds of progressive education.”

This teaching vanguard sought to “refute the assumptions of traditional education . . . and encourage schools to replace traditional subjects with practical studies.” Unfortunately, the result was to put the traditional curriculum—which had produced the very educators who were now tearing it down—“up for grabs, available for capture by any idea, fad, or movement that was advanced by pedagogical experts, popular sentiment, or employers.”

Over the years, progressivism took many forms, some blatantly elitist. One of the more pernicious trends was to view the millions of immigrant children populating U.S. cities in the early 1900s as ill-equipped for rigorous study. The “powers” possessed by these students were regarded as “fundamentally manual,” a notion progressives used as one of several excuses to abandon the traditional academic curriculum.

Today, as educators scramble for explanations, politicians for solutions, and parents for answers, it is instructive to remember what W.E.B. DuBois told a group of teachers in 1935: “The school has again but one way, and that is, first and last, to teach them to read, write, and count. And if the school fails to do that, and tries beyond that to do something for which a school is not adapted, it not only fails in its own function, but it fails in all other attempted functions. Because no school

as such can organize industry, or settle the matter of wage and income, can found homes or furnish parents, can establish justice or make a civilized world.”

“Left Back” recounts the failure of numerous 20th-century pedagogical theories, such as the child-centered, the self-esteem, the I.Q. testing, and the multicultural movements. All of these share a common root: the rejection of education’s “historic rationale”; the idea that truth, wisdom, and knowledge are worthy of pursuit for their own sake, and not for what they can “do” for the individual or for society.

Twentieth-century reformers thought they were merely being practical in rejecting such “quaint” ideas. But what they actually accomplished was akin to removing the cornerstone of the edifice of knowledge. The “education crisis” we have experienced ever since has merely been the sound of that edifice crashing. Having nothing of comparable substance with which to replace it, the reformers opened the entire enterprise to the merry-go-round of vocationalism, politicization, and endless pop-psychological tinkering.

Those seeking quick policy solutions will not find them in this book. For an edifice—easily torn down—is difficult to rebuild and must be put back together slowly, piece by piece. What Ravitch has provided is a first step toward any solution, which is to understand where we are and how we got here. In this sense, she has performed a service few historians have equaled.

Samuel Walker is a communications specialist with the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland, Mich.



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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.”

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“AAE is reasoned, balanced, and classroom-oriented, leaving politics to political entities.”

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Professor of Education,
University of Tennessee

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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



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our shared concern for
America’s children**

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Diverse Viewpoints

Should schools require teachers to join a labor union?

Unions benefit teachers and students

On Sunday mornings, when my children complain about getting up and getting ready for church on their only day to sleep in, I use one of my favorite parent lines: "Darlings," I say endearingly, "you don't *have* to go to church, you *get* to go to church." It's sort of that way with unions. It's not easy to part with one's hard-earned dollars in order to be a member of something of which the benefits are not always immediately apparent. But in the long run, it's worth it.

Unions are a cornerstone of our democracy; they are the voices of many banding together to speak more loudly than any individual ever could. Every working man and woman in America owes a debt to America's unions. Not only have they raised the standard of working and living for each individual they represent, they have improved the institutions with which they are affiliated, the places where union members work.

Nowhere is that more true than in American education. Unapologetically I will say that unions have dramatically improved the pay and working conditions of teachers and other educational employees. If that were not the case, we would be looking at an even greater shortage of teachers than is already predicted for the 21st century. Unions need to continue to strive toward benefits that are commensurate with one of the noblest professions, but they need to continue their longstanding tradition of advocacy for schools and children as well.

Compulsory union membership is not an obstacle to educational reform, as some would claim; it is an integral component of change and improvement in our public schools. A study by the Institute for Wisconsin's Future bears this out. Their research indicates "student performance is significantly better in states where over 90 percent of teachers are unionized." This study takes into account region, family income, race, school spending, and levels of private school attendance. Students in these highly unionized areas scored significantly and consistently higher on the SAT college entrance exam and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) fourth grade reading test in a state-by-state comparison. This is in sharp contrast to districts that had low (less than 50 percent) or even moderate (50 percent) union participation. These same conclusions are echoed by a study published in the winter 2000 Harvard Educational Review. This article, by a clearly nonpartisan publication, refutes perceptions by those who criticize public schools and public school unions. It cites higher test scores on both the ACT and SAT in "states with greater percentages of unionized teachers."

After close scrutiny of the factors above, the Wisconsin group also indicates that collective bargaining does not harm student performance. In the last 10 years, school performance among all children has been improving. Differences in performance occur more between states than over time periods. In fact, report after report demonstrates that unionization is associated with more stable, productive school environments with higher test scores.

This study goes well beyond the assertion that unions may have a neutral or, at best, mildly positive effect on schools. In fact, their findings show that "Teachers' unions have increased productivity and quality in schools by helping to regulate working conditions." Couple this with the huge turnover of staff seen at charter and private schools and we have a partial explanation of the constructive role unions play in schools.

Scores of public school students are improving in almost every subject area as well. Breaking up unions or offering optional union membership would reverse this trend. Student achievement in math and science as measured by the NAEP has shown a steady increase for all ethnic groups over the last 15 years, as cited by a study of the National Science Foundation. A report by the College Board, cited by reporter Mary B.W. Tabor in the March 27, 1996 New York Times, indicates that American students continue to improve their SAT scores. Scores on the math component of this test were the best in two decades. Scores on the other major college entrance test, the ACT, have also risen.

All these data fly in the face of the accusation that unions are thwarting the improvement and achievement of public schools. Conversely, education associations have held to the research-based data which show that real school improvement comes from support for quality teaching, modernizing America's schools, educating from early childhood, fully funding the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, opening the doors to higher education to more of our country's children, and lowering class size. This is the plan for educational excellence that unions propose to our national legislature.

Fred Baker is president of the 660-member Midland City Education Association. He was a language arts teacher for the Midland Public Schools for 21 years before being elected to his present position.



Fred Baker

YES



Esther Hall Gordon

NO

Forced unionization is wrong for teachers and harmful to education

There are many reasons to oppose forcing teachers to join or pay dues to a labor union in order to keep their jobs, but I would like to focus on three. They are as follows: Forced unionization subverts the American political process; tramples on teachers' basic freedoms; and encourages divisive factions to form among public school board members and employees, parents, and administrators. Let's look at these arguments one at a time.

First, forced unionization allows unions to manipulate America's democratic political process. Every election cycle, the National Education Association (NEA) pours vast sums of money in dues coerced from teachers into efforts to influence the outcome of everything from local school board elections to races for federal offices. In an April 2000 article entitled "Government-Granted Coercive Power: How Big Labor Blocks the Freedom Agenda," Reed Larson, president of the National Right to Work Legal Defense and Education Foundation, estimates the annual income from dues and fees for the NEA to be well over \$1 billion, a large part of which goes to fund its political agenda.

Budget statistics reported in the February 2001 issue of MEA Voice, the newspaper of the NEA's state affiliate, the Michigan Education Association (MEA), show that \$2,623,627 will be spent during 2000-01 to fund "activities related to our Political Action Committee . . . and congressional and legislative membership contact team." MEA Secretary-Treasurer Steven Cook states each union member "contributes" \$20 annually for "lobbying activity in the Legislature advancing established MEA positions and resolutions as necessary and appropriate."

But there is evidence to suggest that the unions' lobbying power relies more on coercion than on popular support. In 1992, after Washington state voters passed an initiative requiring annual written approval for the political use of dues, the number of teachers willing to contribute to their union's political agenda fell from 45,000 to just 8,000. In Michigan, Public Act 117's requirement that unions get annual consent from workers prior to taking political action committee (PAC) payroll deductions lowered the MEA's PAC contributions from over \$2.5 million to \$1.9 million in 1998.

Another problem with forced union membership is that it unequivocally denies workers' freedoms. "Nearly 80 percent of Americans understand that it's just plain wrong to force someone to pay tribute to an unwanted union in order to get or keep a job," says Larson. "[But] few understand the far-reaching consequences of government-authorized forced unionism." Unbelievably, the law contributes to the stronghold of the labor union machines by granting them the power to not only collect billions of dollars every year through forced dues or fees, but also to terminate workers who refuse to contribute to the unions' political agenda.

Nevertheless, precisely what the MEA's agenda is remains unclear. Without a more definitive explanation of what its "congressional and legislative membership contact teams" are lobbying for or against, it is impossible for a public school teacher to determine whether the dues or fees which they are forced to pay are used to fund political positions with which they have ideological or moral objections.

No American citizen, union member or otherwise, should be forced to provide financial support for any organization without *first* being provided with a complete disclosure of the political ideology of that organization. To force professional educators to financially support the political "positions and resolutions" of the MEA without providing a full explanation of what those are is an insult. The MEA gets an "F" for its lack of accountability on this issue.

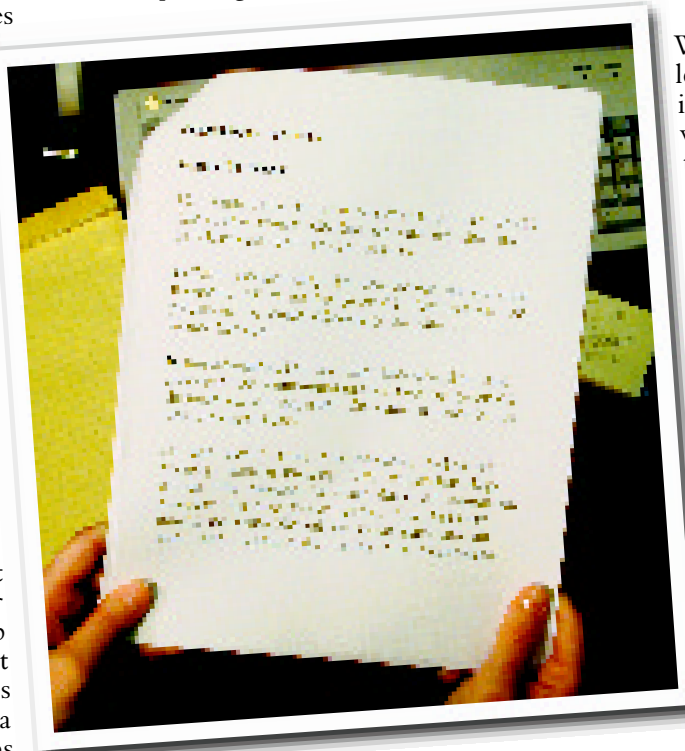
Finally, forced unionization results in the overpoliticization of our schools. Union politics often result in factions developing among public school board members and employees, parents, and administrators. And squabbling factions take their toll on our school system. How? By taking the emphasis off schools' main priority: education. As increasing amounts of time and resources are spent on political wrangling, the education of children takes a backseat to ongoing "turf wars" within and among school districts.

For example, all MEA building representatives should have a clear understanding of the role of their UniServ director. It's simply "overkill" to threaten to call in a union official to settle every interpersonal matter, whether or not it's related to contract administration, grievance procedures, or collective bargaining.

Neither should union officials be called upon by disgruntled staff to gain support for local building concerns between teachers, students, parents, and administrators. The threat of the union becomes a divisive tool when used in an attempt to gain a stronghold over local issues. Little wonder that the "politics of education" have become so distasteful within public schools, communities, and districts.

To deny professionals within the public educational system their right to *not* join labor unions, and to forcibly collect union membership dues and fees from those who oppose the ill-defined liberal political agendas of the union is an abuse of power. A public school teacher's freedom of choice *from* compulsory unionism should be protected rather than denied. Why? Labor unions cannot solve local concerns within American public schools and communities because labor unions represent their own interests and not those of children.

Esther Hall Gordon is a public school counselor and teacher. Originally from Chicago, Illinois, she has been a Michigan resident since 1981 and currently serves in the Bellevue Community School District.



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

Tell us what you think: "Should schools require teachers to join a labor union?" Send your comments to

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