

# MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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News and analysis for educators, parents, and policy makers

Early Fall 2001

## SHORT SUBJECTS

A tax credit for money donated to public or private schools would be available for individuals or businesses if a bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R.-Mich., becomes law. Under the plan, the credit would equal 75 percent of the total tax bill up to a maximum credit of \$500 for individuals and \$100,000 for corporations. Donations could be used to provide scholarships and greater educational choices to families.

**Budgeted increases for Michigan K-12 schools** were lowered by 5 percent recently as Gov. John Engler blamed state legislators for failing to pass the state's \$11.7-billion budget for K-12 education before leaving for summer vacation. The unexpected funding adjustment, totaling \$175 million, has districts scrambling to revise downward their budget projections for the school year.

**Prompted by recent high-profile school shootings**, the nation's largest school employee labor union announced plans to offer a special \$150,000 life insurance benefit for teachers and other union members who are slain at work. The National Education Association approved a new "unlawful homicide" benefit to add to the traditional member life insurance plan, officials said recently. Though tragic shootings are highly publicized, statistics show the likelihood of school employees being murdered on the job remains low.

**Finding data on every Michigan school district**—including spending levels, graduation rates, and test scores—is now easier than ever, thanks to the debut of a new web site in May. The web site provides visitors with access to a comprehensive school evaluation system, the first of its kind in the country, developed by the Wall Street bond-rating firm Standard and Poor's. The system lists up to 1,500 items of data for each school district and summarizes each district's strengths and weaknesses. The site, [www.ses.standardandpoors.com](http://www.ses.standardandpoors.com), will cost the state of Michigan an estimated \$10 million to maintain over the next five years.

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## MEA employee salaries well above teachers'

### Highly paid union officials oppose cost-saving measures for schools

Many Michigan Education Association employees are earning salaries more than twice as high as the average teacher, according to recently released U.S. Department of Labor data.

The information, part of an annual report labor organizations are required to file with the U.S. Department of Labor,

revealed that 125 staffers of Michigan's largest school employee labor union received salaries and disbursements of over \$90,000 from September 1999 to August 2000. The average Michigan teacher salary is \$48,695.

Executive Director Charles Anderson was the union's highest paid employee,

receiving \$173,691 and over \$50,000 in additional disbursements. MEA President Lu Battaglieri received the seventh highest salary, pulling in \$127,099 with an additional \$70,000 to cover items including travel and a car.

The MEA disclosed that it spent nearly  
**MEA SALARIES** continued on page 2



Tennessee educator and researcher William Sanders (left) and State Superintendent Tom Watkins (right) discussed student testing at a July 19 State Board of Education meeting. Sanders explained a new form of evaluation that Michigan may implement in the future.

## Proposed federal rules could force changes in MEAP

### State officials look at better ways to boost achievement, accountability

The state of Michigan likely would have to change how it tests public school students, if legislation including new federal testing requirements passes Congress and is signed by President Bush.

The legislation, intended to promote greater school accountability by tracking student achievement, is in a joint committee, where legislators are working to reconcile differing versions approved by the Senate and House earlier this year.

Currently, Michigan students participate in Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) testing in the fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth, and 11th grades. The state-mandated tests are intended to ascertain how well students have learned the state-established curriculum in the areas of math, science, reading, and writing.

Revamping the present system to conform to whatever new federal mandates, if any, are passed might be a monumental task, but some officials see it as an opportunity to better link testing and accountability.

On July 19, William Sanders, a Ten-

nessee educator and researcher, met with Michigan State Superintendent Tom Watkins and members of the State Board of Education to explain a new method for improving accountability called "value-

**MEAP CHANGES** continued on page 4

## Established schools convert to public school academies

For-profit companies now routinely provide to school districts food, transportation, janitorial, and other services—and even full-scale districtwide school management services.

But sometimes the trend works in reverse, such as when private schools convert to tax-funded public school academies, or charter schools. According to the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, nearly 13 percent of Michigan's 186 charter schools converted from existing schools, some of which were formerly private.

One such school is Woodland Park Academy, a K-8 school in Grand Blanc that specializes in science activities and fine arts programs. Woodland Park began as a privately funded school, but switched to operating as a public school academy in 1996 when it asked for and received a charter from Central Michigan University.

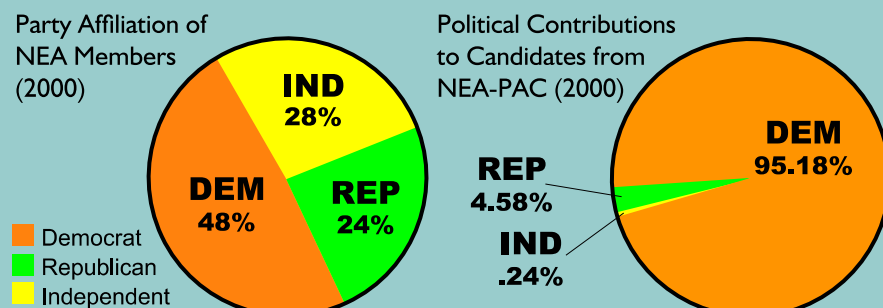
The process for converting an existing school into a charter school can be quite complicated.

At Woodland Park, adapting administrative procedures to conform to state regulations has been one of the biggest challenges. Confusion surrounding the administration of state-mandated Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests resulted in the school's 1999 scores being invalidated when student cheating was alleged. This uncertainty in a new and unfamiliar situation unfortunately led to problems and negative publicity for Woodland Academy.

Despite such setbacks Woodland Park  
**CHARTER SCHOOLS** continued on page 2

### Education at a Glance

#### NEA Political Spending Compared to Teachers' Views



Although over fifty percent of NEA members identify themselves as Republicans and Independents, more than 95 percent of NEA-PAC spending went to Democrats in the 2000 election cycle.  
Sources: Federal Election Commission, National Education Association, Education Intelligence Agency, The Feldman Group, Education Policy Institute.

## MEA Salaries

continued from page 1

two-thirds of its \$58.2 million in revenues last year on salaries, benefits, and employee and officer expenses.

Part of this amount comes to the union in the form of dues payments from members, which equaled \$48 million last year. According to 2001 figures, full-time teachers pay \$457 in annual dues to the MEA, plus another \$123 to the MEA's parent organization, the National Education Association. Other school employees, including janitors, bus drivers, cooks, and other service personnel represented by the union also pay hundreds in dues each year.

The union doesn't see it that way. "Do we understand we're well paid, and we have to earn every bit of it?" MEA Director of Communications Margaret Trimer-Hartley told the Grand Rapids Press. "You bet. The folks who work here are highly degreed people. They're very dedicated."

MEA officials are also dedicated to ensuring that school-related jobs are performed only by dues-paying union members. Over bitter MEA opposition, many districts have "outsourced"—contracted out to private companies—non-educational services such as busing, food service, and custodial work, reaping savings that in turn can be applied to classroom instruction, including increased teacher salaries. The

union with its custodial work, food service, security, and mailing functions. Three of the four firms used by the MEA were non-union, and the company that operated the MEA's cafeteria was the same firm that operates many public school cafeterias over official MEA objections.

In addition to opposing school support service outsourcing, the MEA, through contract negotiations, pushes districts into spending tens of millions of dollars each year on unusually costly health insurance provided by a non-profit subsidiary of the MEA, the Michigan Education Special Services Association (MESSA). A study by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, "Michigan Education Special Services Association: The MEA's Money Machine," revealed that MESSA uses money intended for education to subsidize the MEA's basic operations and political activity. Therefore, attempts by districts to use non-MESSA health insurance may mean less revenue for the MEA.

The MEA is not the only school employee union under fire. See *Illegal Union Political Spending* below for information on unions accused of and fined for using member's money illegally for political purposes.

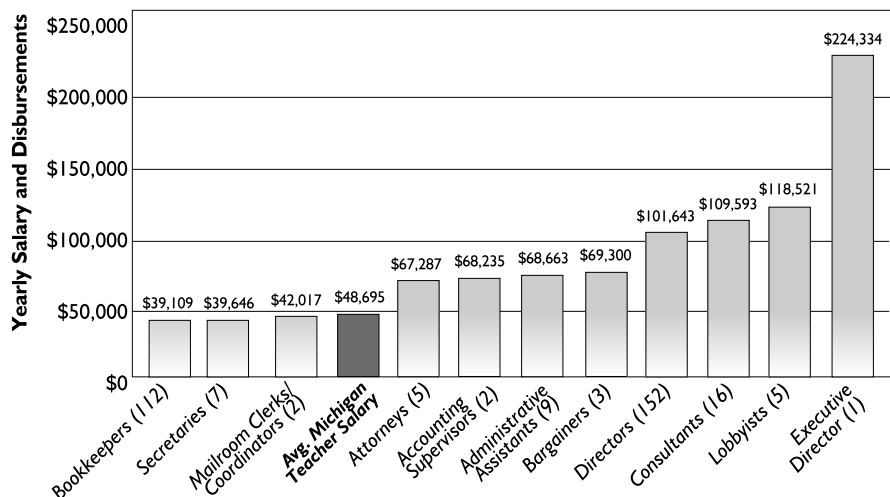
MEA documents state, "The mission of the MEA is to ensure that the education of our students and the working environments of our members are of the highest quality."

But parents and even teachers are increasingly concerned about the conflict between the MEA's goal of improving education and its activities that raise costs for schools and decrease funds that can be used in the classroom.

According to Esther Gordon, a public school teacher and MEA member from Bellevue, "Labor unions represent their own interests and not those of children."

To view the MEA's financial statements or for more information on the MEA, visit [www.mackinac.org/mea](http://www.mackinac.org/mea).

**Average Salaries and Disbursements to MEA Staff Members**



Source: MEA's 1999-2000 LM-2 filed with the U.S. Department of Labor. To view the MEA's financial statements, visit [www.mackinac.org/mea](http://www.mackinac.org/mea).

In addition to an annual revenue of \$58.2 million, the union holds more than \$32.6 million in net assets.

Some critics are charging the labor union with hypocrisy for taking money out of teachers' more modest salaries in order to generously compensate union officials.

Tom Shields, a Republican political consultant in Lansing, told the Grand Rapids Press, "These (MEA) guys plead poverty, and they say they represent the middle class then you see they're all living high on the hog. There's nobody making any sacrifices there."

resulting outsourcing can reduce union membership as school employees join the private companies performing the service.

Outside MEA-organized public schools, however, the union embraces privatization as a sound management tool. A 1994 investigation by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy found that the MEA contracted with a number of companies to perform tasks at its East Lansing headquarters; the same practice it opposes for public schools. The investigation revealed that Lansing-area private firms, instead of unionized employees of the MEA, were providing the

## Charter Schools

continued from page 1

Academy says it strives to maintain academic excellence and correct problems. Recent MEAP scores show fewer Woodland students placing in the "low" category than in the past.

Changes in enrollment and student composition also often occur in the transition to a charter school. Woodland's student enrollment nearly tripled in its first few years as a charter school. The student population expanded to include more diversity in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and educational background. As a private school for gifted children, Woodland was able to select and screen students; however, as a charter school, admission is now determined by a lottery.

Woodland's student population also includes students with special education needs. Under Michigan law, charter schools must provide special education opportunities to students needing them. So Woodland Park hired a part-time special education teacher and a consultant to work with the students. A full-time speech therapist was also added to the staff.

Discipline is another issue. Problems were less prevalent when the academy was private because of strong parental involvement and smaller classes, says one Woodland teacher who asked to remain anonymous. "It only takes a few to ruin it," she said. "I have to spend 60 percent of my time in discipline with only 40 percent left for class instruction."

Now Woodland Park teachers face more challenges as students come from a wider range of family backgrounds. According to the teacher, students are sometimes less prepared due to lack of early education at home. She also noted some parents are "too involved" while others neglect to send their children with even a lunch. A possible explanation for this is that parents may place their children in a charter school as a last effort at behavior correction in school. Woodland attempts to establish an orderly environment partly through a uniform dress code, a system the other local public schools have not implemented.

Existing schools that convert into charter schools are not always private. Windover High School in Midland is an alternative education school that admits at-risk students who have dropped out of traditional public school. It offers a core academic curriculum along with skilled trade and enterprise training in areas such as graphic design and technology. Originally a public adult education institute funded by an education consortium, the school was chartered in 1996 by the county intermediate school district after budget cuts left it with little operating funding.

Windover also faced many of the same difficulties that Woodland Park experienced upon its conversion to charter status. Enrollment at Windover immediately increased—from 20 to approximately 100 students.

"The challenge was to learn what we

had to do and do it," says former Windover school board member Linda Starks.

Windover teachers and administrators also needed to be brought up to speed on state regulations and laws. The school initially contracted with an outside educational services provider to handle administrative and financial duties and to train school officials in such tasks, according to John Botz, another former Windover board member.

While critics complain that charter schools take away enrollment and funding from traditional district schools, both schools can benefit from the presence of charters. When choices are available, if one school does not offer the desired services, parents can send their children elsewhere. For example, Woodland Park offered all-day kindergarten and also fine arts programs such as choir and band for elementary

## Illegal Union Political Spending

Washington state's largest school employee union was fined \$400,000 recently for illegally spending some school employees' fee money on political campaigns.

The fine, levied against the Washington Education Association (WEA), is the final outcome of a complaint filed last year by the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, a public policy organization based in Olympia.

Evergreen accused the WEA of illegally using "agency fees," compulsory fees paid by employees who are not union members but who still must pay for union representation,

to fund its political activities. A Washington law requires unions to obtain permission before using agency-fee payers' funds for political purposes. The state Public Disclosure Commission found the WEA guilty of violating this law in September, and the case was referred to the state Attorney General for penalties to be levied.

Last year, the Landmark Legal Foundation, a nonprofit legal organization based in Virginia, filed a separate complaint against the National Education Association (NEA). Landmark filed complaints with the Internal Revenue Service and

Federal Election Commission, claiming the NEA "is spending substantial [tax-exempt] general operating funds on taxable political activities, which it has not reported on its tax returns for the last several years."

For more information on becoming an agency-fee payer, or on alleged illegal activities of school employee unions, visit the following sites:

[www.mackinac.org/mea/refund.htm](http://www.mackinac.org/mea/refund.htm)

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

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

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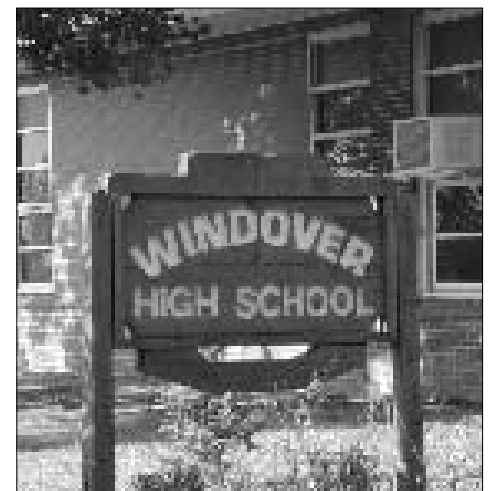
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Windover High School in Midland is one of the 24 charter schools in Michigan that have converted from private or traditional public schools.

schools. The local community school district noticed the demand for these programs at the charter school and added them to their school's offerings. Windover High School provided an additional educational opportunity for 80 more children than before. The school is also establishing relationships with local businesses so that students can secure employment after graduation.

Overall, parents and the public have been receptive to the converted charter schools. Ken Mayo, a Woodland Park elementary science teacher, views the conversion to a charter school as simply "give[ing] parents more choice." Windover's Botz echoed similar sentiments when he said that charter status "allowed us to be more flexible to meet individualized needs."

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# Thousands of students switch public schools under choice law

## But programs let districts do the choosing

In 1996, the state of Michigan made it easier for parents to choose their child's school from among those in their own and neighboring public school districts. Previously, parents wanting to send their children to schools other than their assigned district school were typically forced to obtain permission from the assigned district in order to avoid paying tuition to the desired district.

For participating districts, the law now allows students to transfer between public schools in the same local district, to public schools in the same intermediate school district, or to public schools in contiguous intermediate districts without paying tuition, provided the desired district has space.

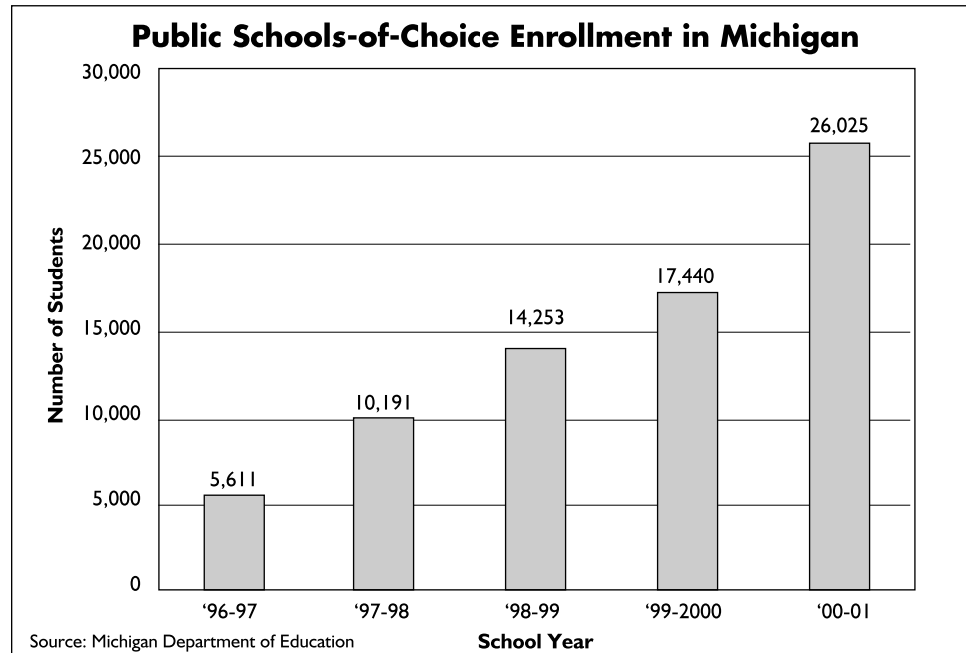
The number of students exercising public school choice is increasing; however, the number involved in the schools-of-choice program is limited because districts control whether or not they participate.

Although the law doesn't explicitly limit the number of students who can leave a district to attend schools outside their district boundaries, intermediate school districts often strictly limit the number of students they enroll from outside neighborhoods. Intermediate school district conglomerates may "opt out" of certain provisions in the state's public school choice plan and create their own choice programs that are actually aimed at curtailing the level of choice. Although the law encourages more choice than ever, choice remains elusive for many students.

According to the Michigan Department

of Education, 283 out of 554 districts participate in Michigan's state schools-of-choice plan, and another 165 districts have adopted their own plans, offering very limited forms of choice. More than 100 districts do not permit choice. Overall, the number of students

their own choice programs, allowing very few students to choose the school in which they enroll. The programs allow students' assigned districts to deny or grant permission each year for that student to attend his or her school-of-choice.



Despite attempts by districts to restrict choice for students, parents are increasingly making public school choices in Michigan.

participating statewide in the choice program has grown from 5,611 in the 1996-1997 school year to 26,025 in 2000-2001, a small percentage of the 1.7 million K-12 public school population in Michigan.

Districts such as the Genesee and Kent Intermediate School Districts have created

If the district denies permission for a student to leave, the student faces the same dilemma he or she would have faced before the new choice program began — they must pay tuition to the district of their choice or stay in their assigned district.

A report by the Flint Journal stated

that in Genesee County these restrictions allowed only 2 percent of the district's students to participate in the schools-of-choice program. Kent permits even less choice.

Scott Jenkins, policy coordinator for the State Government Affairs Division, a branch of the executive office of Gov. John Engler told the Flint Journal the Genesee plan is one of the most restrictive in the state.

"It's not anything that's unlawful, but it's picking winners and losers and they are restricting the flow of students," Jenkins told the Journal. "The real issue should be how the schools provide a good education for these kids no matter what their zip code is. People who defend [placing limits on the number of students who can transfer to other districts] are really talking about jobs for adults and they are not talking about educational quality provided to kids."

The Kent program, which originally allowed only 1 percent of its students to participate in the schools-of-choice program, has undergone recent changes that have slightly increased that figure.

Michael Weiler, associate superintendent of the Kent Intermediate School District, recently told the Grand Rapids Press, "This is a competitive marketplace now, and we are going to be aggressive in emphasizing the quality of the public schools in Kent County. We want public schools to be the schools-of-choice, and all 20 of our districts offer quality programs that should be attractive."

Not all districts have sought to limit choice. Some have welcomed the broader choice law as an incentive to better their programs and prove they are ready for competition.

"We welcome competition. The reforms we've enacted would not have happened, at least not as fast, without competition," says Jeremy Hughes, superintendent of the Dearborn City School District.

During the 1990s, as choice increased through the growth of charter schools and public school choice, Dearborn began preparing to retain and attract students. New, specialized programs were developed, with parents' wants and needs becoming the primary focus. Concurrent with Dearborn's aggressive efforts to recruit students, enrollment at Dearborn public schools has increased from 13,857 in 1994-95 to 17,075 in 2000-01 even as competition from neighboring school districts and charter schools has increased.

Despite its limitations, the state choice law—in tandem with Michigan's charter school program—has had a tremendous impact on some districts. Last March, The Detroit News reported that Detroit schools had lost 19,000 students to charter schools and schools-of-choice this year and that no students from outside the district had chosen Detroit schools.

Even with limited choice, parents are beginning to see the potential these programs have to improve schools. Parents say the district must show improvement and offer better educational services to lure students back to the district.

"People are going to have to see the improvements in the curriculum," Rose Starks, a parent of three children in the Detroit school system, told The Detroit News. "If you can satisfy the parents and the children here now, you can then attract new ones. If you don't meet the needs of a basic and challenging curriculum, clean and safe buildings, you will not retain the students you have."

For more on how districts are responding to competition, see the 2000 Mackinac Center for Public Policy report, "The Impact of Limited School Choice on Public School Districts," available online at [www.mackinac.org/2962](http://www.mackinac.org/2962).

# Momentum shifts toward education tax credits

## Credits replace vouchers as preferred vehicle for school choice

After Michigan and California voters last year resoundingly rejected two high-profile school voucher proposals, education tax credits are supplanting vouchers as the preferred vehicle to expand educational opportunities for children across the country.

In recent years, 12 states have consid-

National attention to the tax-credit idea is growing. Last year, a study from the Washington, D.C.-based Cato Institute, co-authored by Michigan-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy Director of Education Policy Matthew Brouillette, explained the benefits of expanding school choice through education credits.

as \$500 and corporations up to \$100,000.

In addition, the American Legislative Exchange Council, a bipartisan association of state legislators, adopted in August a tax credit resolution to encourage state governments to draft tax credit legislation.

And recently, two gubernatorial candidates in New Jersey and Virginia won their party's nominations running on platforms that include education tax credits.

Virginia Attorney General and Republican gubernatorial candidate Mark Earley spent his years in the state Senate and his candidacy for attorney general supporting school vouchers, even authoring a bill in 1994 that would have provided vouchers to students in local schools districts. But Earley recently came out in support of tax credits as an alternative to vouchers, telling the Washington Post that tax credits can provide school choice options to parents and children without opening the door to increased state regulation and intrusion.

New Jersey's Bret Schundler, the first Republican mayor of Jersey City in 75 years, recently won his party's nomination for the upcoming gubernatorial race. In a city where only 6 percent of registered voters are Republican, Schundler has won re-election three times running on a platform of lower taxes and school choice. He advocates for more charter schools and education tax credits.

Schundler recently asked in the Wall Street Journal, "Tell me how keeping poor kids trapped in schools that consistently won't reform helps society?"

In Michigan, state tax credits for K-12 educational purposes are expressly prohibited by the Michigan Constitution. This could only be changed through a statewide referendum or initiative.

States to Recently Consider or Enact K-12 Education Tax Credit Legislation*	
State	Status
Arizona	Passed 1997
Florida	Passed 2001
Idaho	Defeated
Illinois	Passed 1999
Kansas	Defeated
Minnesota	Passed 1997
Missouri	Defeated
Nebraska	Defeated
Ohio	Defeated
Pennsylvania	Passed 2001
South Carolina	In the Legislature
Utah	Defeated
Virginia	Defeated

\*Iowa passed tax credit legislation in 1989.

ered, and six have passed into law, some form of education tax credit. Arizona's program is the largest in the country, having provided more than 18,000 scholarships worth over \$31 million to low-income students since 1998. Earlier this year, Pennsylvania and Florida enacted credits for businesses that want to help pay tuition for students to attend better or safer schools.

In May, U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, R-Mich., introduced federal legislation modeled after the Arizona program and a tax credit plan designed by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in 1997. Hoekstra's legislation was crafted to provide individuals and corporations with a 75-percent tax credit on money given to private or public schools. Individuals could donate as much

# Corporations donate millions for public school programs

*Critics decry growing trend of "commercialism" in schools*

Seeking corporate donations has become increasingly popular as an alternative way for school districts to raise money for additional programs and activities that are not covered by their regular, publicly funded budgets.

In a recent article examining the issue of school fundraising, The Detroit News reported that Detroit Public Schools, which serves approximately 150,000 students, received \$519,000 in individual and corporate donations during the 1999-2000 school year. Though that may seem like a large amount of money, Detroit hasn't scratched the surface of what financial contributions, particularly corporate donations, could provide.

For example, Chicago Public Schools, with nearly three times the enrollment of Detroit schools, raked in \$18 million in corporate and individual donations during the 1999-2000 school year—35 times more than Detroit received last year. Colorado Springs, a 33,000-student district formerly run by current Detroit Public Schools Chief Executive Officer Kenneth Burnley, raises approximately \$1.5 million a year and spends most of its extra money on reading and writing programs.

Arguing for increased corporate involvement in education, former president of the Plymouth-Canton school district board, Mark Horvath, told the News, "It is time we utilize businesses as a revenue stream for the schools."

Why are businesses giving money to public schools in addition to the taxes they already pay?

"It's a win-win situation," Tony Rokita, special events coordinator for the Chicago Bulls professional basketball team told The Detroit News. "We are providing something the district needs and it's great public relations." The Bulls recently

donated \$3.5 million for an after-school Bulls Scholar enrichment program.

In Michigan, groups including the Detroit Lions, EDS, Chrysler, Ford, Compuware, and Delphi Automotive have all pitched in to donate products or services to schools around the state. School districts pair up with local or national businesses that give them funding in exchange for selling their product or promoting the company.

One of the more popular methods for raising money is for a school or school district to sign an exclusive beverage contract with Coca-Cola or Pepsi in return for a share in the profits. The practice tripled across the nation from 1997 to 1999 and now includes 150 districts in 29 states, including many in Michigan, according to The Detroit News.

Robert J. Kemmery, principal of Eastern Technical High School in Baltimore County and president of the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals, told the Baltimore Sun that schools in his area are relying more on businesses for extra money. "The money obtained through vending machine beverage sales has permitted students to participate in drama productions, interscholastic sports programs, clubs and organizations that support the overall traditional curricular program," Kemmery said.

Traditional public schools are not the only educational institutions taking advantage of opportunities to involve local businesses in the education process. The Plymouth Educational Center, a charter school in Detroit, is seeking business partners to help finish a new \$8-million facility and help fund other improvements. Executive director Vivian Ross says the school's largest donors are foundations and other nonprofit organizations, but that

local, private enterprises are becoming increasingly interested in funding her school.

Corporations also offer myriad programs to students, such as internships, summer camps, and work opportunities. One notable program, in Michigan's Southfield High School, allows students to operate an in-school Kinko's copy and office-supply store instead of a school-run enterprise. The store serves students, teachers, administrators, and community members while providing work experience and training in office management, printing and design and giving Kinko's a chance to advertise its services to the community.

Echoing Rokita, Margaret Holcomb, business partnership director for the Southfield district, agrees, "It's a win-win situation."

But not everyone sees it that way. A growing number of parents and other critics are concerned that corporations see school children as simply another market to be conquered and that by allowing advertisers free reign in the school environment, America may turn out a cadre of "consumer cadets" little interested in intellectual pursuits.

Almost as if to confirm critics' worst fears, groups like Lifetime Learning Systems, a company that specializes in business/school partnerships, markets its services to businesses with brochures explaining that, "Through these materials, your product or point of view becomes the focus of discussions in the classroom . . . the centerpiece in a dynamic process that generates long-term awareness and lasting attitudinal change." Elsewhere, Lifetime Learning explains, "Now you can enter the classroom through custom-made learning materials created with your specific marketing objectives in mind."

One of the primary critics of commercialism, the Center for Commercial Free Education, a national non-profit based in Oakland, Calif., says its purpose is to "provide support to students, parents, teachers and other concerned citizens organizing across the United States to keep their schools commercial-free and community-controlled." The center offers a number of community action and youth programs to discourage the use of commercial contracts and advertising in schools around the country.

Some school districts also are speaking out against commercialism. In June 1999, the San Francisco school board voted to prohibit the use of textbooks and other instructional material that mention brand names. The board also banned exclusive beverage contracts, saying the agreements could imply that the schools endorsed certain products.

Bill McMaster, Michigan chairman of Taxpayers United, agreed with the board's actions, telling The Detroit News that, "Corporate sponsorships in the school system are exploitive of the children and wrong. Not only is it unethical, but it is wrong to subject kids to commercialism in an educational environment." And in a recent editorial, nationally syndicated columnist George Will wrote, "schools are becoming case studies in the commodification of everything."

However, so long as school districts struggle with ways to pay for ever-more expensive programs, it is likely that partnerships between businesses and schools will expand. The debate over whether this is good or bad for education is sure to intensify as districts seek more funding through corporate contracts and donations, and businesses seek the positive community image such activity engenders.

## MEAP Changes

*continued from page 1*

added assessment."

Value-added assessment creates the opportunity to track student achievement, as expressed by test results, on an annual basis, as well as monitor trends in teaching and learning over time.

"The single biggest factor affecting students in the classroom is the teacher," says Sanders, who manages a company, Value-added Assessment and Research. According to his research, the residual effects of a teacher on a student can be seen up to four years after that student leaves the classroom. These effects, along with student gains in performance, can be traced using value-added assessment.

The goal of value-added assessment is to measure academic growth for all students. "A minimal expectation is for each kid to make at least a year's gain in a year's time," says Sanders. The proposed federal testing requirements may help Michigan schools and teachers measure student performance according to the value-added assessment model, something that is not possible under the present MEAP system.

Currently, Michigan's MEAP test is not designed to measure student-level yearly growth, since it only assesses students in certain grades and does not track individual students over time. Michigan's testing plan would have to be restructured before a value-added assessment system could be implemented.

There are two major challenges with using the MEAP for value-added assessment. First, MEAP is a criterion-referenced test, meaning the test measures specific content information as determined by

the state and/or curriculum. Second, the testing pattern with MEAP tests make it impossible to measure yearly student academic growth. Students are not followed year-to-year, school-to-school, to track academic progress.

According to Sanders, value-added programs work best with year-to-year testing using norm-referenced tests, which compare an individual student's results against the total results for a group of students. Norm-referenced test scores are often designed to produce results that can be illustrated by a bell curve with the highest percentage of students placing in the middle. Most large-scale national exams such as the ACT are examples of norm-referenced tests.

Sanders explains that yearly student-level testing would provide more information on Michigan's educational system and could aid in school improvement and accountability efforts. "The best insurance policy is to test each kid, each year in all subjects," he says.

State school officials say a plan to create a student-level testing program has been on the back burner for some time. Given the recent discussions over school accountability and standardized testing at the federal level, the state may be forced to implement a new assessment program in the near future.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

**Mandatory schooling may include 17, 18-year-olds**

A bill that would increase the state's school legal dropout age to 18 was recently introduced in the Michigan Senate.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Alma Wheeler Smith, D-Ann Arbor, would amend the state law that allows students to drop out when they are 16. The bill is opposed by Gov. John Engler, who told The Detroit News that raising the dropout age does not address the problems of kids who want to leave school. Engler spokesman Matt Resch told The News that schools should focus on improving early education so that teens want to remain in school.

"If kids are getting the education they need, they won't be thinking about dropping out of school when they're 16," Resch said.

At least six states have considered increasing their dropout age within the last year, and New Mexico recently raised the age from 16 to 17, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Michigan is among 32 states that allow students to leave school at 16.

**Feds push education savings accounts, testing plans, more funding**

President Bush's tax-cut bill, enacted by the U.S. Congress last spring, included a provision which allows parents to save money tax-free to use for private elementary and secondary education for their children. The "education savings account" allows contributions up to \$2,000 per year.

The U.S. House included the tax break to parents as part of the tax bill, but rejected another school choice option, vouchers, when it passed its version of an education bill.

The U.S. Senate recently approved legislation that requires annual math and reading tests for millions of schoolchildren, while rejecting a number of school choice amendments.

The Senate accepted a proposal to add \$525 million to expand charter schools through competitive grants to communities with low-performing public schools in order to give families an alternative.

Congress will take up these issues again in the fall.

**More charter schools in Michigan?**

The number of university-chartered schools in Michigan would gradually increase over the next four years under legislation introduced in the State House in May.

The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, is similar to the one that stalled in the House last year. The plan would increase the number of charter schools by 50 this year, lifting the current cap of 150 on university-sponsored schools. The legislation would allow the cap to increase to 200 this year, by 50 more in 2002 and by 25 in both 2003 and 2004.

Observers say the bill also would increase the number of rules and regulations on current and new charter schools. "We support choice, not more regulation," says Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies.

The House may debate the bill in the fall.

**Defining and improving "failing" schools**

Also in May, legislation to define what constitutes a "failing" school district—a definition that will trigger measures aimed at helping schools improve—passed the Michigan Senate Education Committee.

The package of bills, now headed to the full Senate for review, would define "priority schools" as the bottom 5 percent statewide as ranked by test scores, free lunch eligibility, dropout rates, graduation rates, and percentage of students reading at grade level.

Under the legislation, failing schools would be evaluated on their academics, management, and finances and told to follow an improvement plan created by a State Educational Improvement Board.

Corrective measures could include hiring consultants or management companies, placing the intermediate school district in charge of the smaller district's operations, or opening more charter schools within the district.

# Home-schoolers turn to public schools for support

## Families split on extracurricular participation

Rebecca Stephens loves music. But the 14-year-old home-school student's parents didn't have the expensive equipment necessary to develop their daughter's knowledge and love of her favorite subject.

So the Stephenses, taxpayers in their school district, turned to their local public education system for help. For the past three years Rebecca has been able to participate in the Bullock Creek Public Schools music program.

Rebecca has played in the Bullock Creek band at various levels. She began in the sixth-grade band, but due to her previous experience playing the piano, she was able to proceed directly to the eighth-grade band. Last year, while still in eighth grade, she even played with the varsity band.

How did the district react to taking on a home-schooler?

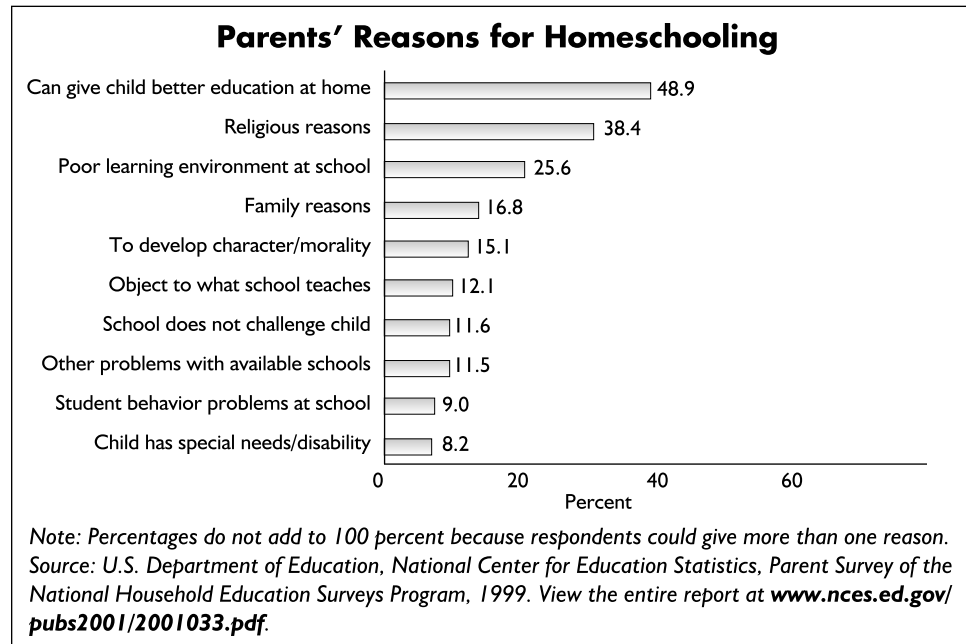
"Everyone at the school was very warm and accommodating," Rebecca's mother, Susan, recalls. She says when she approached Bullock Creek officials, they were completely open to working with the family's schedule and required no records or exams to be presented in order for Rebecca to participate in band. The school was even willing to fill out a report card every marking period on Rebecca's progress in the band.

Rebecca will not continue in Bullock Creek's band next year, due to her involve-

ment in other activities, but is grateful for the opportunity that the district provided her with.

Rebecca is one of a growing number of home-schoolers in Michigan who are taking advantage of their local public schools' extracurricular programs and non-core

said her school is open to home-schoolers participating in non-core classes and has had several students participate in the past. Dow has only one requirement: that participating home-school students reside within the boundaries of the Midland Public School District.



classes including foreign language, art, and, of course, music.

Margaret Lee, assistant principal at Herbert H. Dow High School in Midland,

The Michigan State Department of Education estimates that though there are almost 2,000 home-schoolers who reported to the state last year, there are thousands

more who did not. According to the Home School Legal Defense Association, parents in Michigan may choose to operate a home-school education program, which does not involve any reporting to the state, or they may choose to operate a nonpublic school and submit enrollment figures every year. Brian Ray, president of the National Home Education Research Institute in Salem, Ore., ([www.nheri.org](http://www.nheri.org)) estimates there are as many as 95,000 students in Michigan who are educated at home.

Numbers like this are sure to draw attention from politicians, and some officials have already begun looking at ways to expand home and public school partnerships. In 1999, *Michigan Education Report* reported that Rep. Judson Gilbert, R-Algonac, and Gov. John Engler attempted to open up public school sports teams to home-schoolers, but the proposed legislation died in committee.

One factor currently keeping home-schoolers off most public school sports teams is the eligibility rules of the Michigan High School Athletic Association. Jack Roberts, the MHSAA's executive director, told The Detroit News that the MHSAA's rules do not expressly prohibit home schoolers from participating, but there are "certain eligibility rules and standards that need to be met by all high school students, public, private and otherwise."

These rules include passing 20 credit hours a semester, not having been enrolled in more than eight semesters, and not changing schools unless a move is involved. These rules make it difficult for some home-schoolers to prove their eligibility.

But not all home-schooling families are eager for their children to participate in the public schools' extracurricular activities. In 1999, a survey of state home-school association presidents conducted by the Home School Legal Defense Association found 66 percent opposed to participation, while 34 percent believed the public schools' programs should be opened to home-school students.

Many home-schoolers who shun public school extracurricular activities say they fear that government regulation will follow their participation, and frustration with intrusive government regulation is a key reason they home-school in the first place.

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## STUDENT FOCUS

# Honor-roll student ready to tackle college, career

*Program helps football player achieve goals*

Marlon Robinson, a recent graduate of Bishop Borgess High School, a Catholic school in Redford Township, is an accomplished athlete and honor-roll student with a strong work ethic. Last year Marlon participated in a unique school-to-work program sponsored by Chrysler Corporation. His mother, a Chrysler employee, recommended the program.

The Chrysler National Training Center's high school student program offers 10 courses in subjects including robotics, computer graphics and design, machinery repair, electrical training, customer service, advanced math, and labor relations. Each course lasts four to six weeks, and is held two nights a week from 4 to 6 p.m.

"I believe these classes will help me achieve my personal career goals," Marlon said about his experience with Chrysler. "I believe this program will someday help me find a good job," he said.

Marlon says one of the most helpful



Marlon Robinson (left), a recent graduate of Bishop Borgess High School, is looking forward to attending college and continuing his success in school and football. Robinson is pictured with teacher, Ron Ferenczi.

courses in the Chrysler program was customer service, which included a section on how to apply and interview for jobs. "The School-to-Work program has given me skills I am able to use in the automotive industry, school, and everyday life. These classes have also shown me how to

talk, dress, act, and handle pressure while staying calm."

Marlon's favorite classes were computer accounting and physical science. His math teacher, Ron Ferenczi, says Marlon is a good student who conscientiously works toward his career goals and exemplifies

values, character, and drive.

But Marlon gives a great deal of credit for his success to his school. "In this environment, you get a lot of one-on-one attention and help from teachers," he says.

As for his work ethic, his parents' influence is responsible. "It's in my blood," Marlon says. "I don't really like to hang out on the weekends; I'd rather work." In addition to the Chrysler program, Marlon's jobs have included working for a grocery store, a cleaning service, and a record store. In his free time, he enjoys working on computers and playing football.

Marlon hopes to play football at the collegiate level, and the school he attends will probably like that idea. Through two years of junior varsity basketball and two of varsity football, Marlon has received many awards, including All-State, All-Area, All-Catholic, and All-League awards. He also was invited to play in all-star games in Hawaii and Australia.

Marlon is looking forward to a bright future at college and beyond. He plans to enter a technical university where he can study computer engineering and accounting.

And he hopes to get in a little football, too.

## TEACHER FOCUS

# Schoolteacher brings his experience to the classroom

*Former stockbroker invests time in kids*

Ron Ferenczi's teaching philosophy comes from more than 15 years as a stockbroker, owner of an investment firm, and award-winning investment columnist: Take full advantage of every opportunity.

Ferenczi turned to teaching when his wife Linda told him that the school where she teaches math, Bishop Borgess High School, a Catholic school in Redford Township, needed a teacher.

That was in 1996. By 1999, Ferenczi had been voted Teacher of the Year by the Catholic Association of Secondary Administrators. Today he serves as an algebra, geometry, and chemistry teacher at Borgess. Ferenczi also serves as the school's director of development and marketing, sharing students' success stories with the community and with potential students. This year, Ferenczi began surveying parents on school performance issues, and asked for suggestions on how to improve programs and offer a better education to students. He says the survey was a great success, and parents appreciated the attention given to their opinions and suggestions.

Ferenczi's students say he has an excellent teaching style, is easy to understand, and provides plenty of one-on-one assistance to students. Ferenczi says, "I enjoy being able to show a concept to somebody and see them understand." He takes pride in the school, and the fact that nearly 100 percent of its students go on to college.

The school currently enrolls about 200 students, many of whom receive scholarships and commute from other districts including Detroit.

Last summer, Ferenczi was one of only



Teacher Ron Ferenczi enjoys being a student in the summer, participating in numerous conferences and research trips, including one aboard the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's research vessel, the Whiting.

40 teachers chosen from across the nation to participate in the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Scholarship summer institute for Environmental Science, a three-week program sponsored by Princeton University. The program assists teachers in creating new learning strategies for environmental topics and allows them to continue their own science education through hands-on projects and field trips. Ferenczi enthusiastically encourages other teachers to get involved with

the program, which has a web site at [www.woodrow.org/teachers](http://www.woodrow.org/teachers).

Ferenczi also participated last summer in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Teacher at Sea program, spending 18 days on the Whiting, a 163-foot research vessel, helping NOAA to chart the ocean floor. The data gathered on his trip will ultimately be incorporated into NOAA's nautical charts—documents used by military, passenger, and fishing vessels around the world.

And this past March, the U.S. Army's Great Lakes Recruiting Battalion hosted Ferenczi and other teachers on a tour of Fort Sill in Lawton, Okla., a self-contained city with over

17,000 military personnel and nearly 30,000 family members and civilian workers.

The schools at Fort Sill train army soldiers and marines. Ferenczi's "Educator Tour" provided attendees with a five-day tour of the city and an opportunity to see how recruits are trained.

Ferenczi has been able to use these experiences in his classroom, using ocean charting examples in math class, helping fellow teachers with environmental topics, and providing information to students interested in entering the military.

Ferenczi says the best thing about teaching is seeing students enjoy the learning process. By bringing his professional experience to bear, continuing his own education, and seeking new and innovative ways to teach, Ferenczi serves as an excellent role model for students and teachers alike.

# Workshops prepare public, private, and homeschool students for debate season

*Thousands benefit from annual program*

While most students were sleeping in on their summer vacation, 15 eager young minds gathered the morning of June 22 at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Midland to learn more about U.S. agriculture policy, the fall debate topic for home-schoolers.

The students were attendees of a special workshop designed to offer debaters a headstart on the upcoming academic debate season. Attendees listened as Gregory Rehmke, director of program development with the New York-based Foundation for Economic Education, stressed the ways in which students can employ economic arguments to present a solid case.

Since 1988, the Mackinac Center has helped over 7,000 public, private, and home-schooled students and their coaches through such workshops hosted annually in Midland and other cities including Grand Rapids, Livonia, Jackson, and Grayling.

At the workshops, students hear informative speakers, receive free materials, and get up-to-date news and research so they can begin the debate season armed with an arsenal of new knowledge.

Each year, the National Forensic League selects the resolution debated by public and private school students. The 2001 topic is, "Resolved: The United States federal government should establish a foreign policy significantly limiting the use of weapons of mass destruction."

The home-school debate topic is selected by the National Christian Forensics and Communication Association.

Throughout the debate season, all students are required to demonstrate an ability to debate both sides of the issue, weighing evidence from an objective point of view.

Students and coaches who participated



the most important skills her students learned through the conference were speaking in public with confidence and discovering how to research academic issues.

Anna Lopez, debate coach at public Lee M. Thurston High School

in Redford, has participated with her students in the debate workshops for the past five years because she believes it's important her students "look at both sides of an issue."

"When they hear one side they know there is always another," she says. "They also know to look at the facts and to be able to back up their beliefs, their side with evidence."

The Mackinac Center's 2001 fall workshops will be held Sept. 18 to Sept. 27 in Livonia, Jackson, Grand Rapids, and Midland. All students, whether they attend the workshops or not, have round-the-clock access to a wealth of debate research and information at [www.mackinc.org/features/debate](http://www.mackinc.org/features/debate), including the interactive "Ask the Debate Coach" feature, a free service that provides answers to students' research questions within 48 hours.

in past workshops are pleased with the depth of material and unique approach provided.

"All the free material that was handed to [my students]; the different books and articles were very helpful," says Ucal Finley, debate coach at St. Martin DePorres High School in Detroit. She adds that



Photos from 2000 Debate Workshops.

# Debate over Proposal A continues seven years later

*School officials criticize lack of taxation power*

In 1994, a Michigan ballot measure called "Proposal A" changed the source of school funding for districts throughout the state. What was once a local responsibility, based on property tax levies, became primarily a state responsibility, funded through a variety of state revenue sources including a 50 percent sales tax increase.

Before Proposal A, local school districts were responsible for approximately 68 percent of school funding. This method of funding was criticized for creating high property taxes and large per-student funding differentials between districts. Proposal A sought to reduce property taxes, reduce the need for local millage votes to provide money for education, increase the state share of total revenue for K-12 education,

and provide a guaranteed minimum per-pupil level of funding, while reducing the gap between districts' per-pupil funding.

The measure achieved many of its goals. The change in method of school funding successfully narrowed the spending gap in many areas around the state, boosted funding for the poorest districts, and reduced property taxes. The state is now responsible for providing approximately 80 percent of school funding.

But some say the new school funding plan is leaving small districts behind and stifling local control of schools.

Proposal A does not allow local districts to ask voters for additional funds (millages) for operating purposes, with the exception of 39 high-spending districts. They can seek



School districts such as Redford Union are facing cuts in extracurricular programs and teacher layoffs. Some attribute the budget difficulties to Proposal A, which shifted school funding from the local to the state level. Others say the problem is failure to manage costs.

tax increases for capital expenditures such as facilities. If schools are losing enrollment, and therefore per-pupil funding, they must adjust their budgets; a difficult task for some districts.

Officials representing small schools with declining enrollments, particularly in

the Upper Peninsula, say Proposal A has limited their ability to provide educational services, because those services don't lend themselves to the per-pupil model.

"You've got fixed overhead per class. It doesn't matter if you've got two kids or

PROPOSAL A continued on page 9

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Livonia, Tuesday, September 18th  
 Burton Manor, 27777 Schoolcraft Road

Jackson, Wednesday, September 19th  
 Commonwealth Commerce Center, 209 E. Washington

Grand Rapids, Wednesday, September 26th  
 Eberhard Center, Grand Valley State University

Midland, Thursday, September 27th  
 Valley Plaza Inn, 5221 Bay City Road

For more information  
 Call Catherine Martin  
 989-631-0900  
[www.mackinac.org/features/debate](http://www.mackinac.org/features/debate)

# Moving beyond bake sales

## What teachers, parents, and the law say about "parental involvement"

"Parental involvement" is a term that has taken root in the public discourse on education reform. Unfortunately, as is usual with such terms, everyone's for it, but everyone has a slightly different idea of just exactly what it means.

Recently, Detroit schools chief Kenneth Burnley announced a plan called "Shhh! Our students are working," aimed at motivating parents to get their children to school well-fed and on time, and to make sure they have regular, undisturbed homework time.

"People send their children unprepared to learn every day," Burnley recently told the Detroit Free Press. "And the community pitches in to help them do

**Colleen Warwick, public high school English teacher from Saginaw offers her insight on parental involvement:**

"I have seen first-hand how the lack of parental involvement affects children. Remember when parents were 'room parents,' in kindergarten and pre-school? In some schools it might even last through the elementary years. Why does it ever stop? Because the kids are 'too old?' Although I disagree with imposing an involvement requirement on parents, I believe parents should be more active in the classroom and in students' academic lives."

a better job, and they continue to send their children to school unprepared to learn." Burnley says the plan may require uninvolved parents to perform community

service, and he hopes it will raise awareness of the need for more parental involvement.

Other districts are approaching the issue a little differently. The Detroit suburb of Flat Rock is launching a pilot program in elementary schools offering parents the opportunity to choose their child's teacher. And parents in Hazel Park successfully proposed a plan to allow parents to complete surveys on how their schools and teachers are performing.

Even the law says something about the importance of parental involvement. The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires schools to create parental involvement policies in order to receive federal funds for struggling students. The ESEA says schools must form parent-school partnerships, providing school materials and training to help parents work with their children at home, and instructing parents on school curriculum and standards.

When people think of parental involvement, many think of the nationwide Parent-Teacher Association, the traditional PTA. The PTA is known for forming local groups of parents to participate in school activities and lobby school boards and legislators on education issues. The PTA supports the ESEA and other federal mandates for parental involvement programs. Its web site can be viewed at [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org).

The PTA offers the following suggestions for involving parents in schools:

Teachers should consider offering weekly parent newsletters, homework phone lines for parent assistance and assignment information, evening meetings for parents, parent-student assignments, parent-teacher-student contracts, reading challenges, parent-teacher conferences and phone calls.

Despite a reported 6.2 million PTA members across the country and an established reputation in Washington, the PTA recently announced that its membership has been "static" for the past decade. Many

believe this is the result of a backlash against increased PTA lobbying on controversial social issues unrelated to education, a dissatisfaction also suggested by the recent growth of new Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) across the country.

**Cathy Egerer, a fifth-grade teacher from Midland, suggests the following for parents:**

- 1) Attend the fall "Meet the Teacher" night
- 2) Attend parent-teacher conferences
- 3) Monitor your child's homework
- 4) Take your child to the library regularly and spend time reading with your child
- 5) Volunteer at school if you are able
- 6) Offer to share a hobby or area of expertise with your child's class
- 7) Talk to the teacher if your child indicates there is a problem.

PTOs are similar to PTA groups in that they are local groups of interested parents created to address school issues. But PTOs tend to be solely focused on the activities and issues in their district or school building and less involved with lobbying for state or national issues. PTO membership dues are usually reserved for local activities, whereas a considerable portion of PTA member dues is sent to the national PTA for lobbying activities.

The national PTO maintains a web site with resources for parents, [www.ptotoday.com](http://www.ptotoday.com), but does not have an active national agenda. The national PTO primarily encourages parents to work within their communities and schools to establish relationships between teachers and parents, and to raise money locally for school needs.

The Michigan Education Association (MEA), the state's largest school employee union, also encourages parental involvement. The MEA's "Parents" web site ([www.mea.org/Design.cfm?p=175](http://www.mea.org/Design.cfm?p=175)) instructs parents to meet their child's

teacher, become familiar with school regulations and practices, keep up with children's homework and school activities, and ask for assistance from teachers or principals when their student has a problem at school.

Although the MEA acknowledges the

### Websites with More Information

Parents in Charge  
<http://www.parentsincharge.org/>

ESEA Rules on Parental Involvement  
[http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/Title\\_I/parinv.html](http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/Title_I/parinv.html)

National Coalition on Parental Involvement in Education  
<http://www.ncpie.org/>

Education Week, Parental Involvement Page  
<http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/issuespage.cfm?id=12>

Michigan Electronic Library Parental Involvement Resources  
<http://mel.lib.mi.us/education/edu-parents.html>

importance of parental involvement, the union has fought some parental involvement proposals, including the aforementioned parent survey proposal in Hazel Park, because they would impose new requirements on teachers. For more information on the Hazel Park proposal, see the related article, "Parent-designed survey to rate teachers meets opposition," in the spring 2001 issue of *Michigan Education Report* ([www.educationreport.org/3414](http://www.educationreport.org/3414)).

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COMMENTARY

# Homework requires teamwork— between teachers and parents



**Dr. Robert Hanna**  
*Dr. Robert C. Hanna is director of teacher education at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan.*

children to develop qualities that all teachers like to see in the classroom, such as persistence, diligence, and the ability to delay gratification.”

Not long ago, it was common for parents and teachers to frequently discuss the subject of homework and to agree on its value. Questions parents raised included how much should be assigned, how much time should be permitted, and to what extent it was permissible for parents to help. We now have some teachers who assign little homework and too many parents who don't accept responsibility for making sure students get it done. As one Michigan public school second-grade teacher wrote home to parents, “I realize that many of the children are in Campfire, Brownies, Cub Scouts, gymnastics, Awana, etc. These are wonderful activities to be involved with and very important to the children. However, I still think the children can read a page or two even on those days.” If little is asked of students and parents, little should be expected back.

There also are teachers who assign no homework at all. Students, they explain, will not do it anyway. But by not assigning homework or by having no consequences for homework turned in late or not at all, teachers cause the very outcome they predicted. And neglectful parents only reinforce a lax attitude when it comes to studies, which makes matters worse.

Some teachers stop teaching early in the class period and tell their students to work on their homework. They explain that this is the only way homework will actually be done. But is it homework if it's done during class time?

When the quantity of homework is excessive or when “busywork” is assigned, little is learned and negative attitudes can develop in the children toward homework, the subject matter, the teacher, and even school itself. But these are not reasons to assign no homework. The best safeguards are good principals hiring competent teachers in the first place and actively monitoring each teacher's effectiveness, while parents pay close attention to homework content.

Schools should have, as many do, homework policies published in both the faculty handbook and the parent/student handbook. For instance, the Will Carleton Academy (a Michigan charter school) informs teachers, parents, and children that seventh- and eighth-graders can expect 60 minutes of homework daily, sixth-graders 50 minutes, down to 10 minutes for children in kindergarten.

For older students, Hillsdale Academy in Hillsdale, Mich., implements a sound practice. This school progressively increases the quantity and quality of required homework for students in grades nine through 12, with the following published policy for students, parents, and teachers alike:

If a student spends more time on homework than designated [in the handbook], the teacher who assigned the homework should be promptly informed so that corrective measures can be taken. While, occasionally, homework assignments will require more than the designated time, if a student is spending excessive time on homework with little likelihood of satisfactory completion, the parent should help the student find a reasonable stopping point and then attach to the homework a note detailing the time spent on the incomplete assignment. The teacher will accept the homework and will then call the parent to review the circumstances.

Learning both in school and at home can make the difference between mediocre and exemplary academic achievement. If more Michigan teachers were conscientious in assigning homework and if more parents backed them up, we might soon be reading more stories in the newspapers about successful schools and students.

## Proposal A

*continued from page 7*

30 kids,” Rep. Ron Jelinek, R-Three Oaks, recently told *The Detroit News*. “You’ve got to heat that room. You’ve got to have a teacher.”

Even in larger districts, complaints are rising over Proposal A. Districts losing students to charter schools or other public schools through the state's schools-of-choice program also lose the corresponding

per-pupil funding, but they no longer have to spend money on students who no longer attend their schools.

Many districts, including Redford Union, Comstock Park, Grand Rapids, and Holland have made significant budget cuts, teacher layoffs, or cuts to extracurricular programs due to declining enrollments.

Holland Superintendent Marcia Bishop and others are urging the Legislature to provide extra money to districts that are losing students to schools of choice. “What we’re faced with is reducing programs

without reducing the quality of the education we offer,” she recently told the Grand Rapids Press.

Some critics also say Proposal A has stifled local control of school districts, giving more decision-making and regulatory power to the state. Dependent on the state for the bulk of their funding, and without the ability to ask local voters for additional funds, districts are subject to the state's direction and control over school issues.

Despite complaints about Proposal A, overall funding for public schools has increased by more than 50 percent since 1994, more than double the rate of inflation.

Nevertheless, Proposal A has forced many districts to re-examine spending practices and look for ways to save money and shift more funds away from administrative expenses into the classroom.

One of the most effective methods for saving districts significant funds has been the privatization of school support services. School districts including Pontiac, Mt. Pleasant, and Detroit have saved millions of dollars by contracting out school services

such as food, groundskeeping, janitorial, and computer services. By exercising these options, districts have been able to direct more money into the classroom.

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy recently offered to help Redford Union school district to avert a layoff of teachers through privatization. It guaranteed the district \$350,000 in savings if the district would adopt its ideas for outsourcing and competitive bidding for non-classroom services. The Mackinac Center also offered to give the district up to \$350,000 if the savings failed to materialize. Redford Union has yet to accept the offer.

It appears that the debate over Proposal A will continue and even intensify in the next legislative session. Recent legislation was introduced that would amend Michigan's school finance system and grant more taxation power to districts. What is not apparent is whether Michigan citizens are willing to keep the sales tax increase and accept higher property taxes as a result.



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- A basic approach.
- Universal, critical principles woven into daily lessons.
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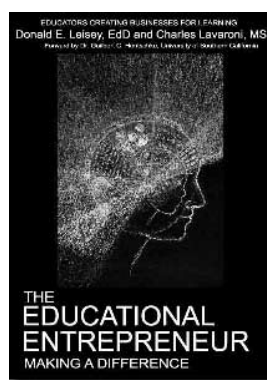
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We welcome your questions and comments.



## The Educational Entrepreneur: Making A Difference

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



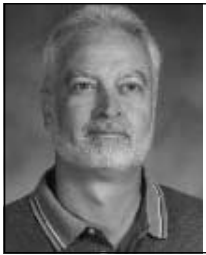
The authors, former public school superintendents and private school owners, celebrate the lives of twenty two educators who have built a wide variety of successful businesses for improving education and learning.

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# Stem the erosion of local control in Michigan



## David Follett

David Follett, a 25-year veteran teacher, teaches at Crestwood Middle School in the Kentwood Public Schools.

Have you ever wondered why it seems that everything politicians touch in the name of "reform" ends up worse than before? Education reform in Michigan is a fine example of what happens when politicians' prescriptions fail to adhere to guiding principles that have provided good education in the past.

Take local control as a case in point. Instead of restoring control of education to parents, children, and teachers, reforms of the past decade—including Proposal A, charter schools, vouchers, and MEAP testing—have served to centralize decision-making with distant bureaucracies. And these reforms have, in true doublespeak fashion, done so in the name of "local control." How did this happen?

First, Proposal A of 1994 was sold as a means to reduce property taxes. However, this school financing scheme shifted financial responsibility for public schools from local communities to the state. Furthermore, the savings from Proposal A were not as great as proclaimed. The amount of taxes going outside the state to the federal government has increased because many property owners have lower deductions on their federal returns and they are unable to take advantage of the Homestead Property

Tax Credit.

U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra and Kevin Clark, vice-president of the Holland Board of Education, in a March 20 commentary to the Grand Rapids Press entitled, "Local Control Dwindles under Proposal A," suggest that we may have "lost our local public schools to another hostile takeover" and that current limits imposed by the state have eroded local control.

Gov. Engler touted charter schools as a way to "break the mold" of the educational status quo and stimulate more experimentation in our public schools. The verdict isn't in yet, but preliminary studies seem to show little deviation from the traditional norm. Many of these schools are authorized by public universities, which also erodes local control. But most importantly, the pressure to do well on the MEAP ensures that most of these schools will be more concerned about conforming to state standards (read: the status quo) rather than experimenting with new, different, and—dare we say—better approaches.

Vouchers then were proposed as a way to empower parents in their choice of schools. But vouchers will merely lure private schools, and their constituencies, into the fold of state dependency. There is merit in the impulse for greater school choice, but relieving schools of state dependency through tax credits rather than state-funded vouchers would better preserve local control. Likewise, although the state has a valid interest in encouraging education, it should do so by letting parents keep their money to spend on education as they choose. This is true empowerment and local control.

It is the MEAP test, however, that is the main cord that binds educational reform to centralized control by the state. A few years ago there was a healthy debate going on about the necessity and use of the MEAP test. The arguments centered on whether another test was needed when the nationally normed tests, the ACT, and the SAT, seemed more appropriate. Many citizens have rightfully feared that the MEAP could be used as a tool for social engineering. The "correct" answers are determined more by a student's perspective than objective reasoning (please study a copy of this year's eighth-grade social studies MEAP and see if these fears are not well founded).

The state is even trying to buy off opposition to the MEAP by using federal tobacco settlement money to award MEAP-based college scholarship funds. Furthermore, private schools that once shunned the MEAP are now lining up to take the test so that their students could justifiably benefit from the scholarship program. Chalk up another victory for centralized control of education.

Why is local control so important? Local control is not a quaint new idea, it is the bedrock of our country's greatness. The wisdom of capitalism and the free market is that people are more productive when they have a vested interest. Local control and decision making is what assures a vested interest.

America's Founding Fathers understood the principle of local control and applied it in the design of our government. They understood that people take a greater interest in those things over which they have control than in those things they feel

relatively helpless to affect. This same principle needs to be restored to our school system.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of state education policies are serving to further remove local control of education. Instead of centralizing such important decisions, it is time we stem the erosion of local control in Michigan and restore decision-making to the people most affected by the consequences.

## We Have a Winner!



Michael Ohanian, a seventh-grade technology education teacher and Michigan Education Association member at Shelby Junior High School in the Utica

Community Schools system, is the winner of Michigan Education Report's Palm IIIx giveaway!

Michael's name was drawn from among the names of the over 350 educators, parents, and others who responded to MER's 2001 Reader's Survey.

Michael has been teaching for seven years and holds a bachelor's degree in technology education from Eastern Michigan University and a master's degree in educational leadership from Saginaw Valley State University. Michael and his wife Michelle (who also teaches at Shelby, where they met) are the proud parents of three boys: Joey, Michael, and Jacob.

"I enjoy reading Michigan Education Report because it is an easy way to receive information that directly pertains to me as a teacher," says Michael. "It's hard to find the time to research a topic and find information that is up to date and correct. I have made reading Michigan Education Report part of my ongoing education process that I do as a teacher to keep myself informed of topics that are shaping the future of education."

Survey results will be in the next issue of Michigan Education Report.



**education freedom fund**

**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.*

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## 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

# Reading Recovery revisited

## Readers defend literacy program

*Editor's Note: The spring 2001 issue of Michigan Education Report included a commentary critical of Reading Recovery, a program used in many Michigan public schools to assist students who struggle with reading. ("Reading Recovery is no such thing," viewable at [www.educationreport.org/3430](http://www.educationreport.org/3430).) The commentary drew a considerable response from our readers, much of which offered praise for Reading Recovery.*

*Michigan Education Report does not take a position on which reading program is best for children. Because children's learning needs are unique, parents and teachers must have choices in educational approaches and not be limited to any one reading instruction program. Therefore, we would like to share a number of the responses we received in response to the criticism of Reading Recovery. Responses are published as received, but names have been removed to protect the identity of the children. Also, below you will find links to various web sites that provide information and research on different methods of reading instruction.*

*Michigan Education Report welcomes feedback from our readers. To respond to this topic or any issue related to K-12 education in Michigan, please drop us a note at [MER@EducationReport.org](mailto:MER@EducationReport.org) or write to us at the address listed on page 2.*

"[Reading Recovery] is a tremendous program. It has brought my child from not being able to read books or letters to being able to read."

"My child loves to read. She is always walking around with a book in her nose. This is all due to the Reading Recovery program that she was in."

"It's a shame that Ms. Chah-bazi would attack such a worthwhile program when she is so misinformed about Reading Recovery instruction. She states that phonemic awareness is largely absent from the Reading Recovery lesson. Actually, it is imbedded throughout the lesson along with several other components that encourage children to become independent learners."

"Schools, educators, and methodologies are under intense public scrutiny, as well as they should be. However, when children who would otherwise be labeled or retained are transformed into eager and confident students, then the responsible program deserves our applause and support."

Sincerely,  
Barbara Zarow  
Reading Recovery Teacher  
Rawsonville Elementary  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dear Mrs. Zarow,

I just wanted to thank you for the progress you made with my child. He has done such a turn around on writing & reading. He really enjoyed you as a teacher. Thanks again and have a great summer.

Sincerely,  
Ms. Taylor

Dear Mrs. Zarow,

I would like to thank you for all the reading support you have given my child this school year. It is amazing how I have watched him become a confident reader with the will and desire to want to read. I have spent long hours at home myself trying to help him with this important skill, and together, parent/teacher, the foundation of academics were built.

I am truly grateful for this wonderful program, each day I could see him slowly make progress soon he became excited about reading I could see, and hear, great progress. I see a need to have such programs available to all children in public schools. As he continues to grow and learn, we will continue to use the skills he has learned.

Thank you,  
Debbie P.

### Links to reading research

Educational Resources Information Center - Reading Resources  
[www.indiana.edu/~eric\\_rec/](http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/)

International Reading Association  
[www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)

Read America  
[www.readamerica.net](http://www.readamerica.net)

Reading Recovery  
[www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org)

Reading Is Fundamental  
[www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org)

Reading Online  
[www.readingonline.org](http://www.readingonline.org)

World of Reading  
[www.worldreading.org](http://www.worldreading.org)

Professor Prep  
[www.professorprep.com](http://www.professorprep.com)

National Reading Panel  
[www.nationalreadingpanel.org](http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org)

Reading Rainbow  
<http://gpn.unl.edu/rainbow/>

National Institute for Literacy  
<http://novel.nifl.gov/>

Literacy Center  
[www.literacycenter.net](http://www.literacycenter.net)

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"[Reading Recovery] is great, it builds self confidence in the children and they'll love to read. In fact you won't get them to stop! Keep up the good work, it's really working and it shows in my son!"

## Diverse Viewpoints

## How should we hold schools accountable?

*Accountability in education requires choice and competition*

Educational accountability seems like a straightforward concept, but in the bureaucratic maze of modern public schooling, even the simplest things can take on Alice-in-Wonderland proportions.

In fact, the "Caucus-race" scene from Lewis Carroll's classic work perfectly illustrates the typical bureaucrat's idea of accountability. When asked by Alice what a Caucus-race is, the Dodo responds by marking out a crude, semi-circular ("the exact shape doesn't matter") racetrack. The other assembled characters, including Alice, run about the track at random until the Dodo declares the race over. Asked who won, the Dodo cries, "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes!"

Carroll apparently prefigured what today is known as "outcome-based" education, where the individuals ostensibly in charge are afraid to measure actual academic results for fear of "playing favorites." Therefore, there are never any wrong answers and everyone is always happy.

But is everyone always happy—or are students being cheated out of a real education?

That's where accountability comes into the mix. Too many public school administrators seem to have only a dim grasp of what is meant by the word. Some administrators I've spoken to insist that they are totally accountable because their financial books are subject to almost daily review.

But true educational accountability raises the question, "To whom are schools accountable?" Joe Cobb, elementary principal at Faith Baptist Schools in Davison, responds, "Whenever I'm asked, my answer is that ultimately we are accountable to our students' parents."

Cobb, who also understands his school's obligations to pastors, church members, and the community at large, knows that if parents are not satisfied with their children's education, they can and will send the children to a different school. And that means less "business" for Faith Baptist Schools.

Parental choice is the ultimate in accountability. Faith Baptist parents voluntarily choose to vote with their dollars—even after being taxed to support government schools—for Christian schools. The ongoing threat that parents might withdraw those dollars at any time in favor of another private school, home education, or a government school ensures Faith Baptist Schools remain accountable for the education provided.

For Faith Baptist and other nongovernment schools, accountability is similar to a restaurateur's accountability to his customers. No laws require "good tasting food," but a restaurateur understands that he must provide a product that diners want. It must be of a quality that is higher than any government inspector's standard and at a price that his patrons are willing to pay. The restaurant owner fully understands his customers voluntarily choose his restaurant and that they could choose one of his competing restaurants at any time. It is not accountability to government health and safety standards that keep this restaurateur in business, but accountability to his customer who he must satisfy on a continual basis.

Accountability is measurable. Like the competitors in the Dodo's Caucus-race, each runner wanted to know who won. It is unsatisfying to exert energy and effort and have the results be judged capriciously, or worse, to be told that everybody wins because everyone competed.

In the marketplace, where choice and competition are the rule rather than the exception, accountability is based ultimately on results. Recently, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige told the nation's largest school employee labor union, the National Education Association, that competition in education is inevitable. "It's tempting to pretend public schools are exempt from the law of supply and demand," he said. "They are not. This pretension will destroy our system."

Secretary Paige also noted that record high spending has had little effect: "For 35 years, we've tried to address our failing schools the same way. We've just given them more money, without focusing on results."

Other school officials are slowly recognizing that the private sector can do things better than government, and often at a lower cost. Government schoolteachers, for example, put their own children in private schools at a much higher rate than do parents in the general population. Superintendents and boards of education are increasingly turning to private enterprises to provide non-instructional services such as food service, building maintenance, and technical support. If privatization improves quality and reduces costs of education support services, why not subject the entire school, the classroom and all, to the real accountability that comes from choice and competition?

Accountability is central to providing children with a quality education. But accountability to the right people is most important. Today, our public schools are "accountable" to the real-life version of Lewis Carroll's Dodo, the government. While the government sets up its own Caucus-racetrack, true accountability will remain elusive. Without making schools fully accountable to parents and children, everyone may "win" the farcical Caucus-race, but in the long run we will all lose.

*Tim Schmig, a former classroom teacher, is executive director of the Michigan Association of Christian Schools. He and his wife Sue have three daughters.*



Tim Schmig



Mike Flanagan

*"Accountability" is not a four-letter word, "bash" is*

Let's be clear about one thing: Everyone wants better and more accountable schools. But true accountability in public education will never be achieved if we succumb to the temptation to bash teachers and administrators at the same time that we strive for improvement. Therefore, it's imperative to focus on the ways we can achieve the goals of reform while continuing to recognize and laud the hard work and sacrifices of educators.

The first thing is that we—and I mean parents, educators, reformers, and everyone else—all should agree that "accountability" is not a four-letter word, but "bash" certainly is. Beyond that, I would like to outline four other fundamental principles I think everyone can embrace for introducing greater accountability into a school system in need of repair.

**Consider the MEAP test as one—but only one—important accountability measure.** A lot of attention is focused on MEAP scores as a way to measure the success or failure of certain schools or districts, but we should not be blind to other, equally important measures of accountability. No one would want to suggest holding baseball players accountable for their performance by measuring batting averages, but ignoring other measures such as home runs, strikeouts, runs batted in, and so on. By the same token, if we exclude graduation rates in our evaluation of districts' educational performance, we run the risk of creating a different problem: districts that feel pressure to improve test scores only may not see the value of reducing dropout rates.

**Use the new Standard & Poor's analysis of Michigan school districts' performance to spur improvement.** The state of Michigan recently contracted with the bond-rating firm Standard & Poor's to track a wide range of information about Michigan school district performance. Perhaps the most useful data for reformers is S&P's "peer analysis," which provides a powerful tool for comparing the academic performances of districts similar in terms of size, per-pupil spending, percentage of student body receiving "free lunch" funding, or other factors. When I was a local superintendent I would have given anything for such a tool to help me motivate the staff to improve our schools, relative to our sister districts.

**Expand choices within the public school system.** Districts can be held accountable for higher student achievement if students have more choices within their district—choices that provide kids who aren't reaching their potential in a traditional setting with other environments in which to thrive. I've co-founded eight charter schools, ranging from the Henry Ford Academy at Greenfield Village to one in a juvenile detention facility. My experience with charter schools taught me the best lesson of my professional life: that all kids can make it somewhere.

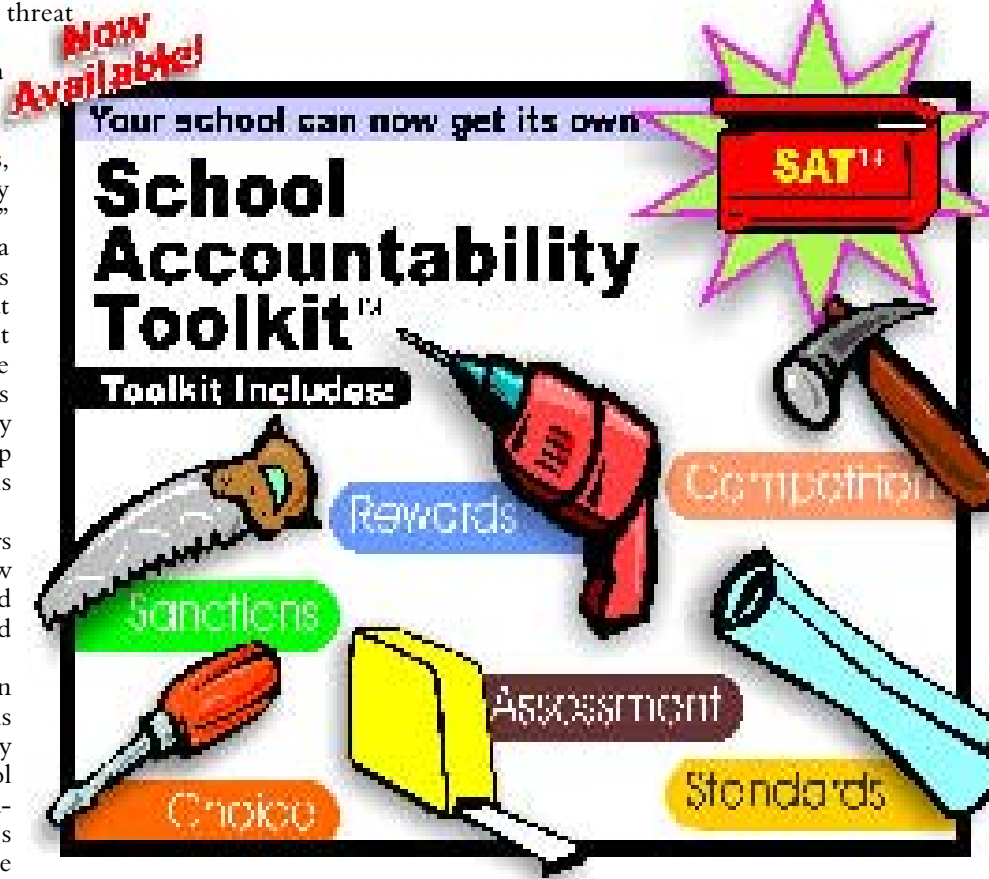
**Hold the community and its families accountable for kids coming to kindergarten prepared to learn.** Parents are children's first friends and teachers, and if kids have never been read to and hugged, the best schools will never be able to overcome the deficit. Unfortunately, some children do not receive the early attention they need. That's why many police chiefs recently rallied for early

childhood programs in Lansing. Of course, parents are the best source of emotional and intellectual stimulation for children. The next best source is the community.

Some people in the education debate are most concerned about how to keep their "public" status quo jobs, even when it is obvious changes must be made. Others are more concerned about how to create "private" jobs for themselves in for-profit schools. But I know the overwhelming majority are just great Americans who care about our kids and the future of this country. All we need to do is to come together and do what's right to fix our schools.

This is the best place to live in the world because of our strong commitment to education: It's why our democracy and economy have blossomed and become the envy of the world. But it's all in jeopardy. And our future—whether we continue to foster a culture of education and leadership, or whether we abandon our children and our future to mediocrity—will be decided one way or the other in the next few years, on our watch. So let's stop the bashing, accept responsibility, and begin building the best possible future we can for our children.

*Mike Flanagan is executive director of the Michigan Association of School Administrators and the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators. He served as superintendent of the Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency and was one of the first public educators to embrace charter schools, authorizing eight public school academies.*



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

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