

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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News and analysis for educators, parents, and policy makers

Spring 2002

SHORT SUBJECTS

The state Department of Education sponsored public forums throughout the state in April and May to discuss possible changes to Proposal A, the 1994 tax law that changed school funding in Michigan. School officials, parents and teachers discussed everything from increasing taxes through additional school millages to providing tax credits for individuals and companies who donate to public schools.

Police arrested over a dozen people, including parents and students, and forcibly removed them from a Detroit school board meeting in March after they disrupted the proceedings with loud chanting. The protesters, including residents and school workers, believe the state-appointed Detroit school board is not legitimate, and want to stop the seven-member board from conducting business. But the protests have continued at subsequent meetings, forcing some to adjourn and the Board to seek a different meeting venue.

There are far too many barriers to teacher certification, according to Frederick Hess, author of a recent study published by the Progressive Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. Hess proposes that a teacher should be certified if he or she passes a criminal background check and satisfactorily completes a test measuring "essential teaching skills" and knowledge of subject matter. Hess' ideas have already taken hold in many states. Forty-five currently permit some form of alternative teacher certification. For more information on the report, visit www.ppionline.org/.

A new study by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy offers the Michigan Legislature a policy blueprint for the upcoming term, including an extensive section on education reform. The study recommends removing the "cap" on charter schools, reform of teacher certification laws, and the expansion of public schools-of-choice programs. The study calls for the elimination of language in the Michigan Constitution that prohibits tax credits for private education, and recommends that tax credits be allowed for public school donations as well as private. View the study at www.mackinac.org/4198.

State Board of Education adopts school grading plan

Michigan schools to receive grades from state under new program

When Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins took office in May of 2001, one of the tasks he faced was to put in place a new school accreditation system crafted by outgoing Superintendent Arthur Ellis to comply with a legislative mandate. The plan—a get-tough policy aimed at whipping into shape a large number of Michigan schools and school

districts that had been allowed to founder and fail—was scheduled to go into effect in the fall of 2001.

State officials estimated that some 1,000 schools might receive "Fs" under the Ellis plan. When he took office, Watkins took the unexpected step of scrapping the plan, saying it relied too heavily on Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP)

achievement test scores, and would unfairly declare schools "failing." Watkins' move was criticized in the legislature and by Gov. John Engler as being an attempt to scrap a program that would have forced Michigan schools to improve.

Despite the critics, Watkins crafted his own plan, which he unveiled in December, **GRADING PLAN** continued on page 2



The state House is expected to revisit a plan, defeated earlier in May, that would allow for 130 more university-sponsored charter schools. Above, students at Midland Academy of Advanced and Creative Studies celebrate a Renaissance Festival with art projects and face painting.

No local autonomy for special education in Michigan

New special education rules make few changes for districts, students

A year-long battle over special education rules ended February 14th when the Michigan State Board of Education endorsed a plan that makes few major changes. The changes would have allowed Michigan schools more flexibility in their programs for children with disabilities.

In March of 2001 the Michigan Department of Education, under the direction of then-Superintendent of Public Instruction Arthur Ellis, proposed rules that would have eliminated state special education mandates on class size, number of students assigned to a teacher, separation of students with severe and minor disabilities, and separation of students by age groups. The new rules would have allowed local teachers and administrators to decide these matters themselves.

The proposed rules were intended to replace an outdated system of regulations that had not changed in 25 years, and give schools freedom to streamline and tailor their programs to the needs of the child. But the independence they would grant **SPECIAL EDUCATION** continued on page 2

Michigan administrative expenses top \$1.4 billion

School administration costs rise over two-times faster than instructional expenses

New evidence suggests that a growing percentage of public school funds are being spent on district administration rather than on teaching. According to Standard & Poor's, the private company hired by the state to analyze school data from Michigan public schools and public school academies, central administration costs have risen more than twice as fast as instructional expenses, including teacher salaries, over the past three years.

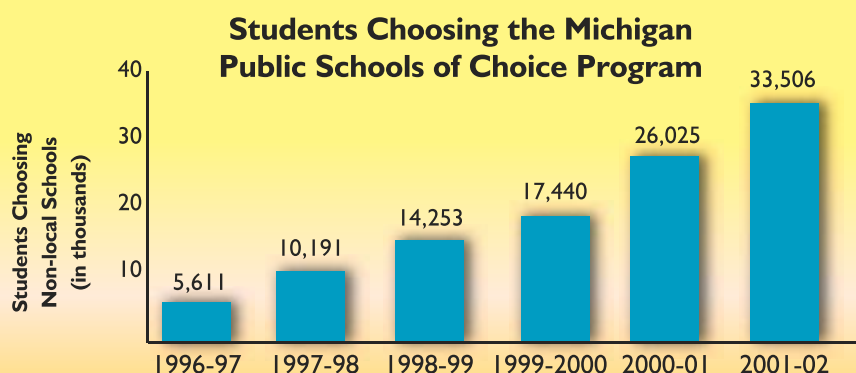
This increase in district administration spending is most evident in the state's largest school district, Detroit Public Schools (DPS). According to The Detroit News, last year eight Detroit employees were promoted to executive level positions and received pay increases between 11 and 48 percent. At the same time, Detroit teaching and support staff positions were cut. According to The News, DPS will now have 34 executive directors, each of whom earn between \$98,000 and \$132,600 and oversee school principals or administrative departments, such as adult education.

Some parents have publicly questioned why the district is hiring more high-level administrators while cutting

teaching positions. Mary Rose Forsyth, whose son attends a Detroit middle school, told The News, "Before they cut anything at the school level, they ought to do away with most administration," she said. "If we are in such a deep crisis, the cuts need to be made at the top. We could get along without them for a couple of years."

ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS continued on page 4

Education at a Glance



More than 30,000 students this year chose a traditional public school other than the one government assigns them based on their residence.

Source: Michigan Department of Education, Education Options, Charters, and Choices Department, January 2002

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Grading Plan

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presented it to the State Board of Education Feb. 14, and was adopted by the board by a vote of 5 to 1 on March 14. After several hours of discussion, the Board accepted a revised version of "Education Yes! A Yardstick for Excellent Schools." This new system had been tweaked to align with the federal government's recently passed No Child Left Behind Act. It will measure such things as teacher quality, building quality, and use of technology, and will employ a weighted student achievement scoring system based on average MEAP scores and MEAP participation.

As required by law, state house and senate education committees have allowed the plan to move forward. Under the plan provisions, no schools will start out without accreditation, and the grades schools receive will not be as strongly tied to student scores on the MEAP.

State Board of Education Secretary Michael David Warren, Jr. voiced his con-

cern with the plan to Watkins at the March 14 hearing, standing behind the plan crafted by Ellis, although he has consented to the new plan. "Every day we wait means another day we lose as we attempt to assist chronically under-performing school buildings and all of Michigan's children," he said.

The new plan assigns a grade to each school building in the state. Each school will receive a letter grade for each of six individual measures and will receive a composite or aggregate grade which determines their accreditation status. The grades to be assigned are: A, B, C, D/Alert and Unaccredited. According to the plan, if individual schools lose their accreditation status, the school will be given notice prior to public release of the information.

The Education Yes! plan establishes the following goals:

- All Michigan elementary and middle school children will read independently and use math to solve problems at grade level;
- All Michigan students will experience a year of academic growth for a year of instruction;

- All Michigan high school students, in addition to demonstrating high academic achievement, shall follow a curriculum that will prepare them for post-high school success.

During the lengthy debate over components of the plan, the State Board of Education debated the cut-off scores for each letter grade, the weight each of the various measures will carry in the total score for each school, and whether or not a traditional bell curve should be used to evaluate test and school scores.

Under the plan, approximately one-third of the score to be assigned to a school will be based on a set of "school performance indicators" such as teacher quality, professional development, attendance and dropout rates, availability of summer school personnel, parental involvement, school facilities, and learning opportunities for students and their families.

The remaining two-thirds of a school's score will be based on student achievement scores on the MEAP, weighted based on an average of MEAP scores and progress over time.

Some education reform advocates still think Watkins should not have thrown out the Ellis plan, which could already have been improving schools following its scheduled implementation last fall.

The new plan language gives schools time to appeal before being labeled as "unaccredited." But the plan offers few penalties or consequences should a school become unaccredited. The only explicit penalty is a denial of the new funding from the federal "No Child Left Behind" Act—until the school works out a plan for re-accreditation with the state Board of Education.

The first official grades for schools are expected to be released in December of 2002 or by spring of 2003.

CORRECTION

"Education at a Glance" on page 1 of the Winter 2002 issue incorrectly identified total per-pupil expenditures as federal education expenditures. The corrected chart is posted at www.educationreport.org.

Special Education

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to local school districts sparked a reaction from advocacy groups that favor centralized control and uniform mandates on schools.

The critics charged that the rules would allow schools to shortchange their special education students to save money. Parents, special education advocacy groups, and lobbyists held rallies opposing the changes during public comment hearings. One spokeswoman, Deborah Canja Isom, executive director of CAUSE, a state and federally supported education group, told the Detroit Free Press that laws allowing greater autonomy mean less certainty for parents. "There will be litigation 'til the cows come home," she said. "When you take certainty out of the process, people will turn to the legal system to set the ground rules."

Proponents of the changes countered that strict controls have created an unnecessarily expensive, one-size-fits-all system that does not fit as many individual needs as could be met if teachers and administrators at the local level had greater discretion in teaching children with disabilities.

Ultimately, current state school superintendent Thomas Watkins Jr. rejected the majority of the changes proposed by Ellis.

Had the new rules passed, Michigan public schools still would have had to follow federal rules under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires states to provide free and appropriate education that meets the needs of students with disabilities. Under IDEA, schools must set up Educational Program Teams—composed of an official designated by the school superintendent, plus the par-

ents of the child—for each special-ed student. The Program Team is to determine the course of education that would most effectively allow the student to reach his or her potential.

The federal IDEA requirements were not enough assurance for the Michigan Education Association (MEA), the state's largest school employee labor union, which opposes more local control of special education. "The overall effect of the revised rules will be that local districts will have the responsibility of developing operational guidelines for developing special education services," wrote Tom VanHoven, in the April 2001 issue of the union's monthly publication, *The MEA Voice*. "We know from past experience that the focus of too many superintendents is fiscal prudence rather than effective instruction," VanHoven wrote.

Others, such as Bob Sornson, executive director of special services for Northville Public Schools, went even further, telling the Detroit Free Press that the special education rule changes were "... an attempt to shift funding responsibility away from the state and to the intermediate school districts and local school districts." Sornson was referring to a long-festering debate, involving \$1 billion in lawsuits during the past 17 years, over which government entity is supposed to pay for special education programs, the state or local districts. Some districts have sued the state, charging that it was forcing them to conduct programs without funding them.

When the Department of Education first offered the new special education rules one month before Superintendent Ellis was to leave office, it gave the typical six-week notice for public comment as required by law. Opponents obtained a court order restraining the Department from ending

debate, claiming the six-week debate period was not long enough to consider the complexities of the proposed rules.

Watkins rejected the idea of allowing intermediate school districts to decide how many students their local district special education programs could handle as well as class sizes for those programs. He said intermediate districts should be able to ask the superintendent of public instruction for permission to determine these matters, but that local districts should not be allowed to have that authority. Also rejected were rules that would have allowed school districts to decide how to group children with disabilities, and rule changes that would have given schools more flexibility in determining the number of instructional days to provide to special education students.

Although Superintendent Watkins said school districts could request waivers from any of these rules, some observers, such as Robert Stoler, a Southfield public school special education teacher, say there are no provisions for hearings should a teacher or parent wish to complain. Stoler told *Michigan Education Report* the granting of waivers is arbitrary, that there is no policy at the Department of Education for granting special education waivers, and that waivers are sometimes granted over the objection of a student's parents and teachers.

The only substantive change adopted by the Michigan Board of Education was to give Program Teams slightly more discre-

tion in determining a students' disability, permitting more general descriptions rather than imposing strict formulas.

Now that the new rules package has been approved by the state school board, it goes to the Office of Regulatory Reform and the Legislative Service Bureau. Once certified by those agencies, it will be sent to the Michigan Legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, which is responsible for the legislative oversight of administrative rules proposed by state agencies. The joint committee will have 21 days to file a notice of objection. If there are no objections, the rules will take effect seven days after public notices are filed.

"Our state has the most rigid and rule-bound [special education] system in the nation," Michael Williamson, former deputy state superintendent under Arthur Ellis and one of the original proponents of the rule changes, told the Detroit Free Press. "Michigan was once a leader in special education. But it's like when you build a good product and are a leader. Over time, conditions change."

Education officials believe that the new rules will be approved by summer 2002 and that schools will be in compliance in time for the 2003-04 school year.

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

Elizabeth H. Moser
Managing Editor

Samuel A. Walker
Editor

Daniel E. Montgomery
Graphic Designer

Christopher Martens, Nathan Crosslin
Special Contributors

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Michigan Education Report • 140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568
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Strict discipline academies

Schools address safety issues and educate “at risk” students.

By Guy P. Dobbs, J.D.

In the fall of 2000, Jacob Guigear brought a 3-inch blade to Carman Ainsworth High School in Flint. For this infraction, he joined more than 1,200 students estimated by the Michigan Department of Education to have been expelled from state schools each year since lawmakers began mandating expulsions for violence in 1995.

Guigear, who had a long history of skipping school, told The Detroit News he’s shaped up since his forced stay at Frontier Learning Center, a “strict discipline academy” (SDA) in Fenton.

“You could look at this as a sentence,” Guigear, who now wears a uniform and is subjected to daily searches, told The News. “But I don’t think I’ll be skipping as much anymore after I get out of here. It’s not worth the effort.”

The strict discipline academy is a relatively new tool available to Michigan educators for dealing with students whose conduct threatens the safety of staff and other students in their schools. Established through legislation in 1999 as part of an ongoing effort to enhance and maintain safety in schools, strict discipline academies are public school academies chartered for the purpose of reforming “at-risk” students without endangering others. The academies provide traditional education courses in a controlled environment—requiring metal detector checks at the door, uniforms, and strict adherence to behavior policies.

As Michigan educators become more

familiar with SDAs, it is likely the future will see one or more established in most of Michigan’s intermediate school districts.

Though the law establishing SDAs is exclusive of Michigan’s charter school law, SDAs are similar to charters in that they can be authorized by a local school board, an intermediate school board, the board of a community college, or the governing board of a state university. They are organized as a nonprofit corporation with a board of directors. Since they are public schools, they can have no religious affiliation.

The law requires that SDA charters be awarded on a “competitive basis” within the boundaries of their authorizing authority, taking into account the resources available, population served, and educational goals of competing proposed SDAs. They are subject to annual reviews by the state, which assesses the academy’s mission statement, attendance statistics, dropout rate, test scores and financial stability.

The law also allows citizens wishing to create an SDA to organize a petition drive if the school board or other authorizing body rejects a proposal that qualifies in every other respect. In order to place a proposal to accept the SDA on a public ballot, citizens must obtain the signatures of at least 15 percent of those citizens living within a school district’s boundaries who voted in the previous school election. If the ballot proposal then receives a majority of the votes in the election the SDA is authorized.

Within 10 days of issuing an SDA contract, the authorizing board must submit

a copy and application to the state Board of Education and must adopt a resolution naming the members the SDAs board of directors. The contract must include a number of important items, including a statement of the educational goals of the SDA, how the board plans to hold the SDA accountable, and procedures and grounds for revoking the contract. As with any public school, SDA teachers must be state certified, except as otherwise provided by law.

As nonprofits, SDAs are exempt from taxation on their earnings and property, but may not levy property taxes. They may not charge tuition and must admit students according to a non-discrimination policy. Like any public school, SDAs receive per-pupil funding from the state for the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the school year. They do not serve juvenile criminals, but the state Family Independence Agency or another state agency can enroll a suitable pupil from a juvenile detention facility in an SDA, provided the agency bears financial responsibility for the student.

Some district administrators have been cool to the concept of opening a strict discipline academy for local students. In Garden City, for example, administrators last year studied and rejected a strict discipline academy. However, without the programs, expelled students are left with few choices. They can seek to continue their education through private tutoring or alternative education programs, if offered by their district.

“With zero-tolerance in Michigan, there is nothing for these expelled kids,” Dan Sherman, vice-president of Educational Services, the private company that manages Frontier Learning Center, told The Detroit News. “Strict discipline academies want to get kids off the street and give them some benefits so they can get back into school.”

Strict discipline academies provide a way for Michigan educators to deal constructively with the growing number of expelled students who might otherwise be left without any opportunity for academic achievement. Incorporating them into school districts’ overall safety plans would provide a positive “last chance” for students who may present a danger to others.

While some opposition in local school districts will likely continue, the establishment of well run strict discipline academies will facilitate education for all of our students, make schools safer, and provide educational opportunities for some students who might otherwise have slipped through the cracks.

Guy P. Dobbs, J.D., is an attorney and principal in the firm of Dobbs & Neidle, P.C. in Bingham Farms, Michigan, where his practice assists Michigan public schools including public school academies.

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New charter plan expected

First charter bill fails in House, legislature likely to revisit this spring

More than two years after the state of Michigan easily reached its self-imposed limit of 150 university-sponsored public school academies and the political clamor to remove the “cap” began, an eight-member panel appointed by the legislature recommended 130 more charters be allowed in the state—but not without trade-offs allowing more regulation of charter schools. A bill produced from the commission’s recommendations was defeated by one vote in the state House on May 1. The legislature is expected to revisit the issue in the coming weeks.

Dubbed “the McPherson Commission” after its chairman, Michigan State University President Peter McPherson, the panel convened in the final months of 2001 after the Michigan Legislature failed to reach agreement on whether to lift the charter cap. On April 10, the commission released its recommendations, calling not for eliminating the cap, but for increasing the number of charters.

Of the 130 additional university-authorized charters envisioned, five “conventional” public school academies would be approved this year (for general education with no particular curricular emphasis), 10 more would be permitted each year for the next five years, and 15 “special-purpose” schools (with particular emphases such as mathematics, humanities, or programs for the learning disabled) would be permitted each year for the next 5 years.

The recommendations also include a raft of new regulations. The commission’s report calls for restrictions on public school academies greater than those on regular public schools.

Currently Michigan is home to 189

public school academies that educate nearly 60,000 K-12 students. Of these, 35 have been sponsored by various intermediate school districts, and three by community colleges. The remaining 150 schools are sponsored by various public universities in the state. The university-sponsorship mode is the most common sponsorship mode under Michigan’s charter school law. It is also the only mode that is limited by the cap. The cap was reached in 1999.

The Michigan Education Association (MEA), the state’s largest school employee union, with the help of Democratic and Republican legislative allies, originally worked to block Gov. Engler’s efforts to lift the cap. Union representatives say their opposition is based on concern over educational quality. Opponents, however, say it is actually because charters, usually non-union, attract students away from unionized public schools. This competition requires traditional public schools to improve their efficiency, often by outsourcing non-instructional services to non-union firms or by seeking alternatives to high-cost, union-owned health care plans.

Despite the union’s initial opposition to the cap increase, when the House bill was crafted to include increased regulations on charter schools and limit the number of schools that could be chartered in the coming years, the union attempted to garner support for the bill that failed May 1.

Supporters of increasing the cap include the tens of thousands of Michigan parents who take advantage of the opportunity to enroll their children in charter schools. Citizens praised charter school

learning environments in testimony before the commission in Detroit and Grand Rapids last December. More than 600 people attended these hearings.

The commission was created in order to examine whether legislation to raise the cap on charters should be pursued. Advocates on both sides of the issue agreed to appoint an eight-member commission, four members appointed by Democratic and Republican legislative leaders from the Michigan House and Senate, two by Gov. Engler, with the final seat being filled by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins. Two key members were Engler appointee Richard McLellan, a Lansing attorney and Mackinac Center for Public Policy board member who drafted the initial charter school law, and MEA president Lu Battaglieri, appointed by Senate Minority Leader John Cherry, D-Clio.

If the commission’s recommendation is eventually approved, Michigan’s public school academies will face a host of new oversight and regulation, including:

- A special annual test of all charter school students in grades 3-8, in addition to the prescribed program of standardized testing administered to all public schools. Those taking the test would be required to meet annual progress standards that would be set by the superintendent of public instruction, a requirement other public schools do not face.

- Greater oversight of charter schools by their authorizers and oversight of the authorizers by the State Department of Education. The state superintendent would oversee universities authorizing charter schools through a new certifica-

CHARTER PLAN continued on page 4

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Administrative Costs

continued from page 1

Whether or not the shift in district spending priorities is intentional or not, it is clearly a statewide trend based on Standard & Poor's data. They show that from 1997 to 1999, while the total amount of education spending in Michigan increased nearly 7 percent, central administration spending increased approximately 18 percent. Administration at the building level, such as principals and school directors, grew at about 5 percent, more than the 3 percent that teacher salaries increased in the same period. Combined, these administrative expenditures make up 10 percent of total annual education spending, or \$1.4 billion. This translates to more than \$846 per pupil in administrative spending.

Detroit schools chief Kenneth Burnley defends the hiring of additional administrators, telling *The News*, "We added (executive directors) to try to get at functions the district had not been doing either well or at all, like raising money for the school district. We are putting people in who have specific expertise we didn't have before."

Some blame increased administrative costs on an increasing number of special needs students and the inflexibility of the state's rules for special education. According to Standard & Poor's, special education costs have increased more than 9 percent from 1997 to 1999. Total spending for special education in Michigan hovered around \$1 billion in 1999. Standard & Poor's cites this increase as a policy concern that needs to be examined by lawmakers.

Standard & Poor's also encourages a serious evaluation of the increase in administrative costs, and suggests that districts consider ways to save money on non-instructional services in order to redirect more funds to the classroom.

For more information on how some districts are working to save money on non-instructional services, visit www.mackinac.org/pubs/mpr/ and www.mackinac.org/3463.

Charter Plan

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tion process. Certifications could be revoked if authorizers do not effectively carry out their responsibilities, as defined by the state.

The commission is also asking that long-term studies be conducted to compare achievement in charter schools with that of other public schools.

Education reformers such as state Rep. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, had previously proposed legislation that would have raised the charter cap by 50 schools in 2002 and 25 schools each year thereafter, with no limitations on the type of school, whether conventional or special purpose. The original version of the bill called for 50 additional schools in 2001 as well. A lack of consensus and leadership in the legislature eventually stalled the bill.

Dan Quisenberry, executive director of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, objects to the limitations on the kinds of schools that can be established, and to a number of geographical limitations that amount to what he calls "a complex scheme of quotas."

"The report says charter schools are vital, yet it gives access only to a few children," said Quisenberry.

The findings of the commission were crafted into a bill in late April, and May brought the House's slim rejection. Supporters of the bill hope it will be reconsidered later this spring and would like to have a bill on Gov. Engler's desk by the summer recess in June.



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Hillsdale College's Hoogland Center for Teacher Excellence is sponsoring two summer seminars, to be held on campus.

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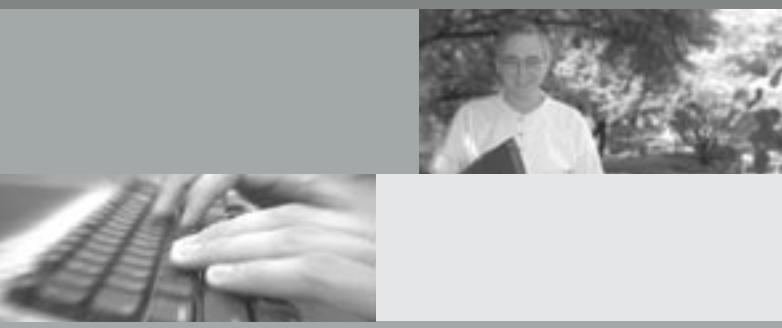
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LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Reducing requirements for substitute teachers

Substitute teachers in Michigan would need just two years of college credits instead of three under a proposal aimed at easing a statewide shortage of substitutes. The bill's sponsor, Rep. Jud Gilbert, R-Algonac, said it would give more options to districts when they need substitutes.

HB 4541, approved in March by the House Education Committee, would allow substitutes to teach with just 60 college credits instead of 90.

Lawmakers have relaxed standards for substitutes before. The state formerly required a four-year degree, including six credits in professional education, to fill in for certified teachers. That was dropped to 90 credits, and the professional education requirement was also dropped.

Expanding the pool of teachers

House Bill 5768, introduced in February by Charles LaSata, R-St. Joseph, would encourage urban school districts to create programs that would grant one-year temporary teaching credentials to unemployed workers who have a bachelor's degree, are enrolled in a teacher certification program, have done student teaching, and teach in critical shortage areas such as early childhood, early elementary, or bilingual education, or secondary math and science.

The legislation could help alleviate a looming teacher shortage. An estimated 2.2 million new teachers will be needed nationwide to replace retiring teachers before 2010.

Revisions to Detroit reform board

House Bill 5791, introduced in March by Keith Stallworth, D-Detroit, would revise the composition of the state-mandated Detroit reform school board to include the state Treasurer, four members appointed by the mayor, and four at-large members elected by district voters. The current composition includes six members appointed by the mayor and the state superintendent of public instruction. The revised board would take control of the district on Jan. 1, 2004.

The same bill also would require each school in the Detroit district to have a site-based management team composed of the principal, two parents, two teachers, one counselor, one school department head, the school facility manager, and the school business manager. The site team would manage the budget and operations of the individual school.

The bill was referred to the Committee on Education in March.

Tax credits for education expenses

House Bill 5870, introduced in April by Jerry Vander Roest, R-Galesburg, would allow Michigan citizens to deduct from their state income taxes an amount equal to the education expenses paid for a student or students attending a non-public school, including expenses for transportation, books, and supplies, but excluding any amount paid for religious instruction.

The bill was referred to the Committee on Tax Policy.

For more information on these and other bills, visit www.michiganvotes.org and type in the bill number to read the bill history, text, and analysis.



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Privately managed public school academy raises achievement for minority students

The International Academy of Flint, now in its third year of operation, is posting dramatically improved test scores, while serving a traditionally under-served and under-achieving population of students.

The school, which operates as a public school academy, is run by SABIS Educational Systems, Inc., a private management company that develops and operates kindergarten through 12th grade schools around the world. The SABIS name originates from the names of partners Leila Saad and Ralph Bistany, who run the company. SABIS uses a specially developed curriculum that focuses on foreign languages, on-going progress assessments in math and English for students, and innovative extracurricular programs.

The worldwide SABIS School Network educates about 16,000 students in countries as diverse as Lebanon, Germany, and Egypt. The company opened Flint's International Academy as a public school academy, chartered by Central Michigan University, in September of 1999 and today serves approximately 700 students in kindergarten through ninth grade.

The academy serves a diverse population. More than 70 percent of the International Academy student body are African-American, and nearly 75 percent are from low-income families whose children qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Nearly 15 percent of the student population is made up of students with disabilities that qualify them for special education programs, and many students enter the academy one to two grade levels behind in both reading and math.

Despite these challenges, students at the International Academy of Flint are making huge academic gains. In just one year, the difference between reading and math scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test have been notable. In 2000, only 27.8 percent of 4th graders at the Academy achieved "satisfactory" math results, while only 22.2 did the same in

reading. The following year, 45.2 percent scored "satisfactory" in math and 36.1 percent in reading.

School director Mark Weinberg is quick to point out that students still have a long way to go in order to meet the expectations of parents and the standards set by SABIS. "It takes time to make up that lost ground," he says. "We're doing all this with an eye on the fact that our mission is to prepare these children for college."

One way lost ground is being regained is through the International Academy's SABIS reading program. Students who enter the school not reading at grade level are supported in the classrooms with extra assistance from paraprofessionals, and ongoing assessments alert teachers to which students need additional assistance. The Academy provides after-school reading labs and summer school sessions for students who need continued

help. Grades one through five require a minimum of 20 minutes of sustained silent reading per day.

The SABIS educational program uses a computerized academic monitoring system to track individual student and class progress. This system provides teachers with reports based upon scores from weekly tests that monitor mastery and retention of learned concepts and detect gaps that may form in children's learning and/or skills. This information helps teachers and students pinpoint areas that need emphasis before new material is introduced. The school sets achievement testing goals for its students, and participates in annual national achievement tests for each grade—in addition to the MEAP—to track student progress.

The International Academy offers a myriad of extracurricular options to its students as well. For example, it offers students the chance to participate in a Student Life Organization, which operates as a student-based

mirror of the school administration. It is run by "prefects"—student representatives who monitor a variety of areas, such as academics, activities, discipline, management, and sports. The prefects manage everything from hall monitoring to the production of an impressive student newspaper.

"Student Life is a fundamental part of our program," Weinberg says. "All of our students are encouraged to take on real jobs and responsibilities to ensure the school runs smoothly. They do everything from tutoring one another to managing the vending machine operations."

"They even organize and plan their own clubs and activities," he said. "It's the best way for them to learn about teamwork, responsibility, leadership skills, and the connection between mistakes and consequences. As a result, they make the school a better community for themselves."

The school also provides opportunities for students to travel overseas and participate in SABIS programs with students from around the world.

During one summer vacation, five International Academy students, along with students from other SABIS schools in Germany, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, traveled to Bath, England for a 17-day leadership training camp.

"The trip was cool because they taught us languages," student Joseph Thompson told the Flint Journal. "I taught them how to play basketball and they taught me how to play badminton. I never played badminton before. I thought, 'This game is cool.' I'm going to try to get it going [at the Flint academy]."

The International Academy also prides itself on its parental involvement strategy. The school conducts parent surveys and offers parents year-round informative seminars on subjects such as the use of technology, the SABIS curriculum, and homework policies. Parents are invited to Student Life presentations and "Evenings with the Director" events that allow parents to discuss school issues with administrators.

For more information on SABIS Educational Systems, Inc., visit the company's web site at www.sabis.net. For information on the International Academy of Flint, visit www.iaf-sabis.net.



The International Academy of Flint provides foreign language classes, an intensive reading program, and leadership training through a variety of programs to its 700 students.

After-School “Diapers/Formula” Rule Wins “Outrageous Regulation” Contest

Administrators call rules “ridiculous”

A law requiring before- and after-school programs to sign a contract with parents pledging that the programs will abide by the same rules as day-care centers—including rules for handling dirty diapers and hungry babies—has won a policy research institute’s “Most Outrageous Regulation” contest. Brenda Roe, learning center director for St. John’s Lutheran School in Adrian, sent in the winning entry.

“I’m not sure about you, but I haven’t yet enrolled a kindergartner that still is fed by a bottle!” Roe wrote in her entry to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy contest, complaining that the children she cares for are ages 5 and above and have no need of diapers or infant formula. The contest was conducted as part of the research for a study on overregulation of Michigan public schools the Center will release this spring. For her winning entry, Roe wins a “Palm Pilot” hand-held computer organizer, a prize symbolic of the order and clarity school administrators want and deserve.

Roe correctly states that Michigan requires all schools with before- and after-school programs (both public and private) to draw up a “child-placement contract” signed by parents and school administrators. This contract pledges that in conducting its program, the school will fulfill all the requirements of the law with regard to the care of children in day-care centers. The contract’s wording must state explicitly that either the school or the parent will fulfill day-care requirements for infant formula, milk, food, diapering, and other matters not commonly regarded as responsibilities of these programs.

“Our parents get a kick out of their contracts,” Roe said.

The regulation, in effect since July of 2001, is part of the Child Care Licensing Act, which is administered by the Department of Consumer and Industry Services (CIS). This is the state agency that oversees all day care in the state.

“This means that schools must operate according to the rules for child care established by the state Department of Education (until the end of the school day),” said Elizabeth Moser, Mackinac Center education research associate. “Then, as the clock strikes the beginning of the after-school program, suddenly they are under the jurisdiction of the CIS and must comply with a whole new set of rules. This creates confusion and, in the case of the diapering requirement, a bit of humor for parents of 5-, 6-, 7-, even 12- and 14-year-olds who sign a contract listing in minute detail state requirements for diapering and infant for-



mula,” Moser said.

Inquiries with workers in various after-school programs in public and private schools revealed everything from confusion over what the law required, to doubt as to whether the law applied to them, to disgust at what many administrators called “ridiculous licensing rules.” But one thing is certain: the idea of actually keeping diapers and formula on hand for children ages five and above is so contrary to common sense that few if any programs actually do so, even though their contract with parents—which the CIS insists upon—pledges that either they, or parents, must do so if needed.

Asked about the contract provisions in question, Norene Lind, an administrative rules specialist for the CIS said, “It’s gotta be there. They [the after-school program administrators] can simply print out everything from the rule, cut and paste, point to the provision, roll their eyes and tell the parents, ‘The state requires us to put it in there; we know it doesn’t apply to your 11th grader.’”

The requirement has elicited enough complaints that legislation removing after-school programs from CIS jurisdiction and placing them under Department of Education rules for child care even during after-school hours has been passed by the Michigan House of Representatives and is headed for approval in the Senate. In a response to a Mackinac Center inquiry, the CIS said it supports the legislation, and that “It is unnecessary for schools to have to meet one set of requirements for the regular school day and a completely different set for their before and after-school programs.”

Public and private school teachers and administrators from all regions of the state submitted entries by email, fax, and letter.

“We picked this one for the humor value, no doubt about it,” said Joseph Lehman, Mackinac Center executive vice president. “But conflicting, confusing and contradictory regulations—and arms of government imposing overlapping agendas that leave school administrators wondering what to do—are an epidemic in Michigan public schools today. It is our hope to shed much more light on this situation through our overregulation study this spring.”

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A regulation requiring schools to maintain parent contracts with instructions for infant feeding and diapering for K-12 after-school program students (shown here) won the Mackinac Center for Public Policy’s “Most Outrageous Regulation” Contest. The contest was part of research for a Mackinac Center study on the over regulation of public schools, as represented here by the volumes of binders containing state-mandated forms that schools must submit.



Education Reform, School Choice, and Tax Credits



The following is based on Mackinac Center for Public Policy President Lawrence Reed's April 16, 2002, testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Education Committee.

Lawrence W. Reed

Few issues are more important to the future of this country than the education of our children. My remarks today spring from a critical premise—a premise that we need reforms that will foster a new burst of individual and institutional involvement in the learning process, reforms that will create a truly vibrant, competitive, and accountable marketplace which attracts widespread, popular participation and enhances parental choice.

Soon, the U. S. Supreme Court will render an important decision regarding the choice program now in place in Cleveland, Ohio. All of us who believe in choice and want to see schools improve for everyone are hopeful for a positive decision that will affirm the program and the right of parents to choose which schools are best and safest for their children. But regardless of the Supreme Court's decision on vouchers, there is another promising form of choice that can be put in place now at the level of both federal and state governments—alongside vouchers or by itself.

Three Kinds of Education Reform

Everybody these days is a public school “reformer” because everybody knows that public education needs fixing at the very least. But not all education reforms are created equal. We believe that all reforms intended to improve the quality of public education fall into just three categories: those dealing with rules, those involving resources, and those concerned with incentives.

Rules-based reforms include such things as extending school days and the school year, changing teacher certification and school accreditation requirements, imposing national and state testing, enacting stricter dress codes, and the like. Research has shown that these reforms, while causing marginal improvements, have failed to turn around a large-scale decline in education. More drastic city or state “takeovers” of failing schools and districts and legislative proposals such as “Outcome-Based Education,” “Goals 2000,” and other regulatory regimes have been and still are being tried, with the same disappointing results. Most of these efforts have driven critical elements of the management of our schools beyond the reach of parents and local school governing bodies and concentrated large portions in remote bureaucracies.

Another attempted strategy to improve public education is through resource-based reforms. They include such measures as increased funding, new textbooks, wiring schools for Internet access, renovating or updating school facilities, reducing class

sizes (fewer pupils per teacher), and other measures that require greater financial expenditures. They all derive from a decidedly unpopular source—raising somebody's taxes.

Scholars have studied the relationship between per-student spending and achievement test scores since the publication of “Equality of Educational Opportunity” (better known as “The Coleman Report”) in 1966. Author James Coleman, a leading sociologist, concluded that factors such as per-pupil spending and class size do not have a significant impact on student achievement scores.

Economist Erik Hanushek and others have replicated Coleman's study and even extended it to international studies of student achievement. The finding of over 30 years of their research is clear: More money does not equal better education. There are schools, states, and countries that spend a great deal of money per pupil with poor results, while others spend much less and get much better results.

Despite this and subsequent findings, many lawmakers and educators continue to believe that additional resources and funding will somehow solve the problems within the government education system.

We have all but exhausted the “rules” and “resources” approaches to education reform, with little to show for our time and money. The one promising category left is “incentives.” I am referring to incentives that will encourage more people to get

involved, as parents and donors and friends of education—incentives in the form of tax credits specifically.

Tax Credits

Tax credits are designed to provide parents with tax relief linked to expenses incurred when they select a school other than the government-assigned one for their children. That typically means a private school, but tax credits can also apply to expenses charged by a public school that accepts a student from outside its regular jurisdiction. The credit is usually a dollar-for-dollar reduction in taxes owed (whereas a tax *deduction* is merely a reduction in taxable income).

Tax credits are typically applied against only state and/or federal income taxes, but property tax credits have been proposed as well. Tax credits might be allowed for any or all out-of-pocket educational expenses incurred by an individual, from tuition to textbooks to transportation to extracurricular fees—though tuition is the most common expense allowed in practice.

Tax credits don't represent a claim by anyone on someone else's wallet. You don't get the credit if you don't pay tuition or if you don't pay taxes. A credit on your taxes represents your own money, period. And credits can be extended not only to parents paying educational expenses but to other citizens or even companies that contribute to scholarship funds that assist children in

EDUCATION REFORM *continued on page 10*

Free summer seminar from the Foundation for Teaching Economics

The Foundation for Teaching Economics is sponsoring a free summer seminar entitled “Economics for Leaders,” July 15-21, on the campus of Hillsdale College. The seminar is open to any teacher of economics and is especially suited for teachers of social studies, civics and history.

Free room and board is provided on the campus of Hillsdale College. All participants receive a \$100.00 stipend upon completion of the program. Program graduates are eligible to submit a portfolio on teaching economics to the Foundation, the best of which will receive a prize of \$5,000.00. Two semester credit hours will be awarded by the University of California at Davis for a fee of \$85.00.

Three Michigan State Board Continuing Education Units (SB-CEUs) of academic credit are available free of charge to Michigan public school teachers who take the seminar.

For more information and to register, visit the Foundation's web site at www.ftc.org, or call (800) 383-4335.



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Incentives for Teacher Performance in Government Schools: An Idea Whose Time Has Come



Robert P. Crowner

For decades, America's education establishment—especially its very powerful teachers' unions—has opposed the idea of "merit pay," or other types of incentives for excellent teaching, as a novel idea smacking of a crass commercialism that has no place in the

hallowed sanctum of the classroom.

But there's no reason why human nature should respond any differently in this realm as in any other. There's nothing base in the fact that economic incentives motivate excellence in virtually every area of human endeavor. Is not the lack of incentives for performance one of the key reasons for the failure of socialist systems around the world? It could also be the key to recognizing a source of failure in our education system.

Teachers are professionals. Yet they, unlike virtually every sort of professional working in private enterprise, have no element of a performance incentive in their pay structure. Incentives work. Does not a salesperson have more reason to increase sales if he is paid at least partially by commission? Does it not make common sense that if excellence in teaching were rewarded monetarily, that teachers would be more likely to try harder?

I was educated as an industrial engineer and worked for 23 years in engineering and manufacturing management. I can testify to the motivational power of incentives—and not always of a monetary kind. Many other kinds of rewards and recognition for achievement and performance have proven to be perhaps even more effective for some individuals. After all, why do teachers put smiling faces, stickers, stars, and personal notes on school papers? Because they touch something in the human soul that makes people smile and try harder.

For the past 25 years I have taught undergraduate and graduate courses in business policy and business ethics for Eastern Michigan University's Department of Management. Here also, I have observed the power of incentives. Students are motivated when challenged to achieve by someone whose knowledge and experience they respect.

In the private sector, incentives have a long and well-thought-out structure that could easily be adapted to our public schools if the prejudice against them could be overcome. Is the job of a teacher so different from any other as to defy the kinds of evaluation that takes place every day in the private sector?

One thing is certain: In the engineering sector, if a company had a deterioration in performance comparable in scale to that which has taken place during the past three decades in student performance on tests, there would be no debate over the matter—because the company would no longer exist. Long, long before the elapsing of three decades, the conclusion would have been reached that something is fundamentally wrong with the system, the problem investigated and an appropriate course of action embarked upon.

Think about it: We would immediately launch into an investigation into the causes of failure, no buts about it. And why? Because the bottom line is at stake. Is it so difficult to understand that teachers have a bottom line, too?

Normally, when we try to judge performance, we seek to measure customer satisfaction. If we use that measure in education, we will ask the parent and future employer if they are satisfied. One measure of this would be the amount and cost of providing remedial education to high school graduates who are entering the workplace or attending college.

A 2000 study by Dr. Jay P. Greene for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy titled "The Cost of Remedial Education: How

Much Michigan Pays When Students Fail to Learn Basic Skills" puts the costs, obtained by averaging five calculations, at around \$600 million annually. Extrapolated to the entire nation, and the amount came to \$16.6 billion nationally.

Another researcher, David Breneman, university professor and dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, also found high national remedial education costs in a separate study.

What this means is that our children aren't graduating from school with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the world—a failure we are paying for in far more ways than monetary. The seriousness of the problem cannot be exaggerated: It is time to try something new.

Unfortunately, rather than being able to attack the problem head on, Americans so far have only been able to nip away at the chinks in the establishment's considerable armor. One of those chinks has widened into a bona fide hole: charter schools. And it is there where teacher incentives are beginning to have an impact. I recently spoke with three charter school management companies operating in Michigan about incentives for teacher performance. Two had an incentive plan in use at all of their schools and one was experimenting with a plan.

Of course, in order to reward performance, you must have a system in place that measures performance precisely. Beacon Education Management, Inc., a private company that runs 15 charter schools in Michigan, is experimenting with a group incentive plan based upon school-wide improvement above grade level in national standardized test scores and parent satisfaction as determined by answers to a 10-question survey.

National Heritage Academies, another private-sector company that runs charter schools, conducts individual teacher assessments that employ evaluations by the school principal, performance goals in 10 different aspects of teaching, student achievement test scores, and parent satisfaction ratings of the teacher. Parent satisfaction is determined by questionnaires mailed twice each year to the parent. Based on these assessments, a Heritage Academies teacher can receive an annual merit-pay raise of up to 8 percent.

Edison Schools, a private-sector, for-profit company that runs not just charter schools but whole public school districts in

some cases, goes even further. The evaluations it uses are conducted by the school principal, based on a four-point scale ranging from "does not meet expectations" to "exceeds expectations." Typically, the average teacher's annual pay increase is in the 4–5 percent range. In addition, at the beginning of each school year, Edison pays each returning teacher a bonus based upon student achievement, as measured by standardized tests. If a school's "report card" shows a sufficient level of improvement from the previous school year, each teacher in the school receives a bonus, typically \$1,000. The school principal can receive a bonus that reaches into the \$7,000 to \$10,000 range, a substantial incentive that can't help but encourage top performance. Stock options are offered to teaching and administrative staff annually after one year of service, vested over a five-year period. Edison teachers also participate in a four-tier career ladder progressing to Senior Teacher and Lead Teacher. These latter two steps carry more pay and can involve some supervisory responsibilities.

Michigan is not the only state interested in performance incentives for teachers. In a poll conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California, 84 percent of that state's respondents said they want teachers paid on the basis of merit. The National Center for Policy Analysis, a nonprofit public policy research institute, has reported that performance incentives are built into many public school academy contracts in Arizona, which has over 420 operating charter schools. A survey of public school academies in Arizona conducted by the Goldwater Institute found that 16 percent give teachers a bonus if students achieve at a certain level or gain a certain percent in test scores. In addition, in 58 percent of the public school academies, teacher contract renewal—which, in most cases, takes place every year—is based on student performance. Another 10 percent base contract renewals on student attendance/recruitment and parent satisfaction.

Laura M. Litvan reported in the *Investor's Business Daily* that in Douglas County, Colo., teachers are offered four types of incentive bonuses: \$1,000 for outstanding teachers; a group bonus for teachers in schools that set a goal and meet it that year; a bonus of \$250 to \$500 for teachers who complete extra training; and a \$35 to \$200 bonus for teachers who accept extra duties. Since the merit pay program began in 1993, average SAT scores in the county have improved drastically.

The major school employee unions often claim that teaching is unlike other professions and can't be evaluated as precisely. As a professor, I have been evaluated by my department head using factors previously defined by the departmental faculty. I have also had peer reviews based upon the same factors. I found these evaluations as reasonable, fair and penetrating—getting to the essence of my performance as a teacher—as those I experienced in my business career prior to teaching. If you are performing well in your job, you have little to fear from an evaluation, and perhaps much to gain in future pay.

Is merit pay an idea whose time has come in education? Let us hope so—and urge our school boards and unions to recognize the motivating role incentives can have for teachers. The evidence becoming available from charter schools indicates that where incentives are introduced into the school environment, teachers put forth more effort, they are happier with their jobs, and their students learn more.

Who can argue with results like that?

Robert Crowner is the Director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Stewardship for the Acton Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a Professor of Management, Emeritus at Eastern Michigan University.



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Some AAE members speak out -

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Education Reform

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getting access to the school of their choice, public or private.

Under a traditional credit plan, only a parent who pays private educational expenses for his child and who has a tax liability greater than the amount of the allowable credit will qualify. The problem with a traditional tax credit is that low-income parents who don't have the money to pay for a private school or have little or no tax liability will be left out in the cold. That deficiency could be remedied partially by making the credit "refundable," meaning the credit could result in a refund check from the government if your tax liability is low.

Another very promising form of tax credit is possible and now getting much attention across the country. My organization, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, is nationally known for pioneering it and showing how it would work as applied to a particular state as early as 1996. We were the first to give it the name, "Universal Tuition Tax Credit" or "Universal Education Tax Credit," and the first to design such a plan for an entire state—Michigan.

Key to the "universal" education tax credit concept is that it allows any taxpayer—individual or corporate, parent or grandparent, neighbor or friend—to contribute to the education of any elementary or secondary child and then qualify for a dollar-for-dollar credit against certain taxes owed. Our original proposal called for an eventual cap on the credit of 50 percent of what the state spends per pupil in the existing public system, phased in over nine years in a fashion that generates a savings in the School Aid Fund every year as some families migrate from the public to the private system. The

maximum credit would be more than enough to cover educational expenses at 90 percent or more of schools. More importantly, our proposal envisions scholarship funds supplied with private tax credit monies. These scholarship funds would be established by schools, companies, churches, and myriad private groups—spurred on by individuals and companies who want to help children get their schooling in the best and safest schools of their choice.

Would tax credits be sufficient to encourage businesses to contribute to education scholarship funds? Absolutely. After explaining the concept, I and others from the Mackinac Center staff have asked CEOs all over our state this question: "Suppose you had a choice. You could send a million dollars in taxes to Lansing or Washington for government to spend on any number of things. Or, you could send that million to one or more scholarship funds to help children who might be your future employees get a good education. Which would you do?" We've never met one who preferred the first option.

The popularity of tax credits among parents has exploded throughout the country in recent years. K-12 tax credits have passed state legislatures in Arizona, Minnesota, Iowa, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Arizona Gov. Fife Symington signed into law a bill in April 1997 granting an income tax credit of up to \$500 for people who donate to nonprofit groups that distribute private scholarships to students. The law also offered taxpayers a credit of up to \$200 for money given to government schools to support extracurricular activities. Arizona expanded its program in 1998 to include tax

credits for donations to both private scholarship programs and public schools. The end result so far has been tens of millions of dollars raised voluntarily to help give children more resources and more options.

Pennsylvania's legislature overwhelmingly approved an "Educational Improvement Tax Credit" (EITC) program that allows corporations to receive a 75% tax credit for donations to scholarship and educational improvement organizations. It becomes a 90% tax credit if the donor commits to making the same donation for two consecutive years. Within a few months of enactment, about \$30 million in donations were committed over two years.

Last year, Florida passed legislation to provide tax credits to corporations that donate up to \$3,500 (per pupil) to non-profit organizations which award scholarships to children from low-income families. The State saves money for its School Aid Fund or other purposes because it now spends \$7,200 on each public school student while the corporate scholarship limit is \$3,500.

Properly designed universal tax credit programs help drive the funding of education away from distant bureaucracies and put it in the hands of all citizens interested in improving education for everybody. It's a great way for every segment of society to get personally involved in education, especially when it's aimed at helping needy children. Universal education tax credit programs that involve contributions for all schools public or private can bring the diverse and sometimes disputatious education community together because they create winners without producing losers. They can make

our school officials fundraisers instead of tax raisers and ultimately allow for better utilization of more resources for schools.

Michigan Congressman Peter Hoekstra is proposing federal legislation that would permit an education tax credit against federal income taxes owed of up to \$500 (\$1,000 for joint filers) for contributions to qualified scholarship funds or to local public schools for construction or technology. Corporations would receive a 75 percent credit, up to \$100,000.

The Hoekstra proposal is a modest start that won't break the budget. It's a great way for the federal government to improve education without spending more, taxing more, or creating any more bureaucracies. It will send a strong signal that the federal government trusts parents. It will spur more charitable giving and a bigger education funding pie at the state and local level. And by not discriminating against private schools over public, or public schools over private, it introduces a new measure of fairness that just isn't in the system now.

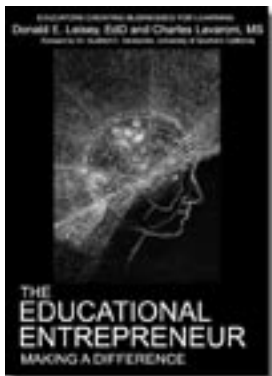
Indeed, education is still overwhelmingly a state and local matter, and that's where groups and citizens should work to craft universal tax credit plans onto their existing tax and education infrastructure that have peculiarities of their own in each particular state. But the broad outlines are clear for every state—help parents, concerned citizens, and businesses help kids by giving them encouragement when they contribute to the costs of providing education. It's the right thing to do. It's the fair thing to do. It will galvanize and strengthen civil society by giving individuals and companies new incentive to assist the educational dreams of their fellow citizens. And it will bolster the incentives of all schools, public and private, to improve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee for your attention and consideration of these ideas.

Lawrence W. Reed is president of the Midland-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute.

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COMMENTARY

Michigan Public School Teachers Launch a Non-Union Revolution



Joseph P. Overton, J.D.

Public schools and their employees don't win many battles against the Michigan Education Association (MEA) union, the political and financial behemoth that dominates Michigan public education. So when teachers and their schools score two major victories in three

months, it's time to sit up and take notice of a new dynamic.

The first shock came in October 2001, when teachers at Island City Academy, a public school in Eaton Rapids, voted 12-1 to oust the MEA as their union. This marked the first time in anyone's memory that the MEA was kicked out by teachers, who believed they were better equipped to deal with school management as independent professionals than with a union go-between. In a petition, the teachers explained that "the union is seeking to protect its own agenda and . . . is causing the district to spend precious resources of time and money that could be used to improve the compensation of teachers or to better meet the classroom instruction needs of students."

Another school delivered the second blow in January 2002, when teachers at Lansing's Mid-Michigan Public School Academy approved a contract, unique in Michigan, that allows teachers to decide without compulsion whether or not to financially support the union. All other public school union contracts contain "compulsory support" clauses that require employees to pay approximately \$600 annually to the union, although a few contracts permit this amount to go to a designated charity.

Most school board members don't know the option for a non-compulsory support provision exists. There are usually significant numbers of employees in any district who oppose unionization, but most

school boards blindly agree to contracts that force all employees to fund the union. Even boards aware of their options succumb to union pressure and intimidation. Either way, forced support further enshrines the union in the workplace and provides compulsory income that the union uses to battle public school managers in negotiations and day-to-day operations.

Mid-Michigan's board dismissed the union's claim that not forcing employees to financially support the union creates "free riders," workers who benefit from union services without paying for them.

Board members recalled that 25 percent of the teachers voted against union representation when it was approved in January 2000. Why, they reasoned, should they force teachers to financially support an organization that many believe does not act in their best interests?

It's no coincidence that these victories against compulsory unionism happened in charter schools, although school boards and teachers at traditional public schools can do the same. Why are charter schools leading the way in innovative labor relations? There are three reasons, each of which reflect a positive sign for the future of Michigan education.

First, charter schools attract teachers who appreciate the professional autonomy they find in a non-union setting. When teachers are able to taste true independence and professionalism, they have little desire for the antiquated baggage of industrial-era compulsory unionism that still dominates traditional government schools.

Second, charter schools must earn the attendance of each student. Unlike traditional public schools, children aren't assigned to charter schools based on residence. To attract students, charters must be free of the expensive overhead and inefficient work rules that characterize traditional government schools. Charters are accountable directly to parents, and survive only if they please these customers by offering a superior education to their children. They recognize that union tactics

that drive up costs and reduce professionalism would kill their efforts.

Third, Michigan charter school board members are appointed by charter holders rather than being subject to public elections. This insulates boards from the political pressure and intimidation that the MEA uses to browbeat elected school boards into submission. This is also a major reason why the MEA fought to oppose Michigan's first charter schools in 1993, and why it fights today to prevent more from opening.

Michigan's increasingly competitive system of school choice is awakening citizens to the detrimental effect that

compulsory unionism is having on public education. Traditional public schools are realizing that they must stand up to union domination to control costs, keep teachers, and end the exodus of students. In the end, the only losers will be labor unions that owe their existence to forced support rather than their own merits.

Joseph P. Overton, J.D., is senior vice president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute in Midland, Mich.

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Diverse Viewpoints

Should education courses be a primary focus of a teacher education program?

Subject matter courses should drive a teacher's schooling

As the director of a Michigan teacher education program, I am uniquely qualified to declare—although fully aware of the surprise it may engender—that education courses should not be a primary focus of teacher education programs.

Of course, it behooves elementary school teachers to know the proven methods for teaching children to read. It is especially in the best interest of middle school teachers to be well prepared in classroom management. And few high school teachers would underrate the academic effectiveness of being able to teach using a variety of methods. Those who argue against the need for such basics have either never taught a full class of other people's children for any significant amount of time or they have done so with a clearly revealed need for improvement.

But if the subject matter being taught is not one in which the teacher is expert—something for which the teacher cherishes a love and a passion in his or her heart—no amount of expertise in teaching methods can make up for this defect. In other words, a teacher education program, while necessary, is only a supplement to the kind of intensive academic preparation that engages intellectual interest and enthusiasm.

Some educators have suggested that teachers need to know only their subject matter up to the level at which they teach, and that this leaves room for greater “professional development” in teaching methods. Besides being impractical, this idea betrays a complete lack of understanding of the nature of knowledge and the teaching relationship.

For starters, because so many teachers are needed and in short supply in relation to their demand, the State of Michigan, like other states, issues teaching certificates for various ranges of grades, requiring more than one-grade's-range worth of expertise per teacher. But even more important, as any great teacher knows, to simply regurgitate the set of facts their students are expected to know from a well that is thus run dry is simply recitation, has no life in it, and will justifiably bore students. A true teacher is one who puts facts together themselves and relates them to and contrasts them with one another, out of a personal, living reservoir of knowledge that can never be too full, but can easily be too meager.

If a Michigan teacher is deemed by the State Department of Education fully qualified to teach seventh through 12th grade history, a superintendent has every right to expect that teacher to know and know well American history, ancient history, world history, eastern history, and the like—regardless of whether that teacher winds up teaching anything but U.S. history, for example. As any serious historian will tell you, a proper understanding of one part of history implies an understanding of how to relate that part to the others, and all of the parts to the whole.

Promises by ill-prepared teachers of always staying “one day ahead of the kids” should be unacceptable to principals and superintendents and are certainly unacceptable to the parents of children in school. As for the children themselves, it doesn't take them very long to figure out when a teacher has reached the limits of his or her academic knowledge.

In the state of Michigan, teachers of kindergarten through eighth grade and seventh through 12th grade cannot be certified without first passing at least two subject-area tests. But this is not the same thing as being required to take courses pertaining to one's subject area. How much subject area content can any one test cover? My answer is very little in comparison with that which can be covered in a liberal arts course, to say nothing of two or three courses—or 10.

Every additional education course on a graduate's transcript replaces what could have been learned in a liberal arts course never taken. If future teachers had unlimited time and funds to take unlimited numbers of courses, then some otherwise unnecessary education courses might be interesting or amusing. But who will seriously argue that before they can be certified, teachers ought to be required to take “Feminist Analyses of Education in the United States,” “Human Diversity, Power, and Opportunity in Social Institutions,” and similar courses (culled from education course catalogues from Michigan and another state), courses of a type roundly criticized as being more about politics than teaching technique?

Parents and school boards count on superintendents and principals to hire teachers who know about classroom management, human development and teaching. But these skills can be taught, learned and practiced by mastering a small number of courses. The education establishment does itself and students a disservice when they use professional development as an excuse to impose unnecessary requirements on the teaching profession.

And they exacerbate an already deepening shortage of teachers.

Robert C. Hanna, Ph.D., is director of teacher education and an associate professor of education at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan.



Robert C. Hanna, Ph.D.

NO



Alane J. Starko, Ph.D.

YES

Extensive pedagogy training essential to teacher education

No human being can be adequately prepared to be everything we expect of teachers, particularly those who teach elementary school. Teachers must be knowledgeable about all the major fields of human endeavor. They must teach a wealth of subjects to collections of complex human beings, each of whom is a unique configuration of prior knowledge, cultural mores, home experiences, learning styles, personality, interests, and motivation.

Teachers must organize children's days and behavior—the challenge of which can only be comprehended partially by parents who have struggled to maintain control of a two-hour birthday party. Teachers must maintain professionalism in the face of countless stressors, speak and write with flawless grammar, work well with others, and yet spend days essentially alone. They should be models of citizenship and moral probity, as entertaining as Robin Williams, as reliable as Cal Ripken, with the analytical skills of Barbara McClintock and the wisdom of Mother Theresa.

How do we prepare anyone for such a daunting task? Courses in education, of course, play a primary role—one of three necessary areas of focus. The first area is general education. At Eastern Michigan University all students, including prospective teachers, take general education courses designed to expose them to the broad spectrum of arts and sciences, enhance their critical thinking skills, and help them understand how areas of specialization fit into the broader fields of knowledge.

The second pillar of our teacher preparation programs is the areas of study students choose for their majors and minors. All prospective elementary and secondary teachers in Michigan have content majors and minors (or, in the case of some elementary teachers, three minors). This opportunity for in-depth study is important to learning the structures of disciplines—understanding the “big ideas” in a field and choosing which, of the many concepts that could be taught, will be of the most value.

Sending out individuals to teach with content-knowledge only is somewhat akin to sending prospective nurses into the hospital after a series of courses in biology but without any clinical preparation. One might argue that with sufficient knowledge of biology nurses should be able to determine what the patients need. But, if I arrived in the emergency room having trouble breathing, I'd much prefer a nurse who had learned and practiced how to open my airway rather than one who knew I needed to breathe and determined how to help me by trial and error. Similarly, when a child arrives in school, I want a professional teacher who knows about teaching and learning, has practiced it under supervision, and demonstrated the ability to help students learn.

With the completion of a general education sequence, a major and a minor, most students would be ready to graduate. But prospective teachers need more. Sending individuals out to teach with content-knowledge only is somewhat akin to sending prospective nurses into the hospital after a series of courses in biology but without any clinical preparation. When a child arrives in school I want a professional teacher who knows about teaching and learning, has practiced it under supervision, and demonstrated the ability to help students learn.

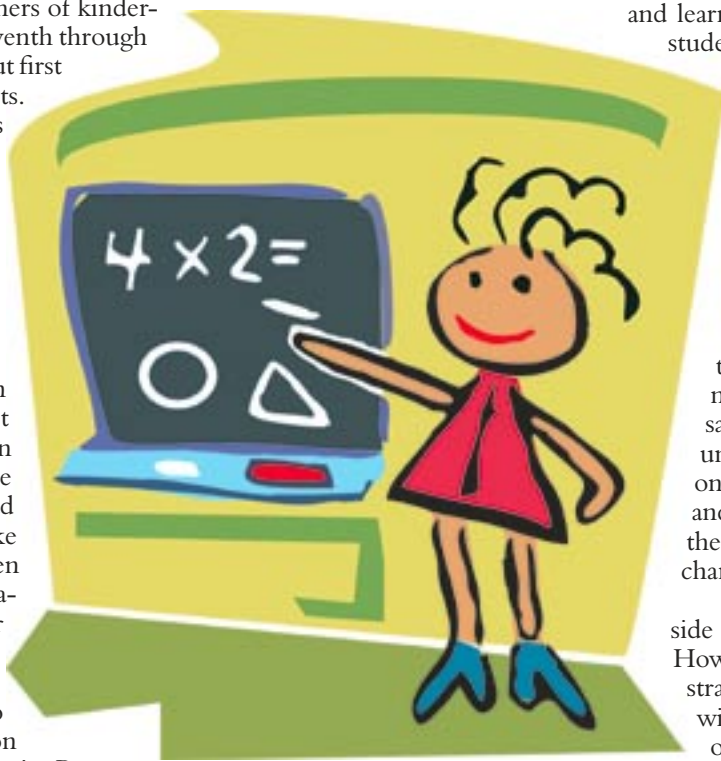
So the third pillar in our program is a pedagogical sequence—a series of courses designed to teach prospective teachers about teaching and learning. They learn about human development and the types of thinking that characterize students of different ages. They learn about the complexities of intelligence, cultures, learning styles, motivation, and teaching children with disabilities. All prospective teachers study (contrary to much popular press) the teaching of phonics and comprehension strategies. Pre-student teaching experiences in schools help prospective teachers practice the teaching skills and analytical thinking necessary to assess students' learning and adjust teaching for student success.

One could argue that there is not a robust body of research demonstrating that teachers with this preparation do a better job than those without it. There's nothing surprising in this—I'll wager that neither is there a body of research that says nurses with professional training do a better job in the emergency room than untrained volunteers or perhaps someone with a Red Cross first-aid course. No one is going to conduct that research because the proposition defies common sense and we don't want to risk our lives and health, much less the lives of our children, in the hands of untrained nurses. But there are those ready and willing to take similar chances with the educational health of children.

Even exceptionally able learners need good teaching. University professors outside colleges of education rarely have anything but content preparation. Harvard's Howard Gardner and others have demonstrated that without appropriate teaching strategies, students in institutions like MIT and Harvard may memorize content without understanding it. The National Study of Student Engagement, an effort of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, annually assesses the extent to which hundreds of students at four-year institutions participate in educational practices associated with higher levels of learning. The field scoring highest on “active and collaborative learning” was (you guessed it) education. Good teacher educators practice what they preach.

It is easy to hear critics responding to this by saying, “But public schools are failing.” The reality is more complex than that. Some schools are failing, typically in large urban centers facing multiple problems. But among the problems is the fact that those schools are the least likely to have fully prepared teachers. Certainly we need alternative routes that will encourage individuals at many stages of life to prepare to be teachers. But they must be high-quality programs that maintain strengths in both content and pedagogy.

Alane J. Starko, Ph.D., is department head of the teacher education program at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Mich.



Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of *Michigan Education Report*. Tell us what you think: “Should education courses be a primary focus of a teacher education program?” Send your comments to

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