

# MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

\$3.00

News and analysis for educators, parents, and policy makers

Early Fall 2002

## SHORT SUBJECTS

# Michigan lagging in teacher quality says federal agency

*Recent U.S. Dept. of Education study finds new federal law will require changes to teacher training, certification standards*

Michigan is failing to produce the highly qualified teachers the recently passed federal No Child Left Behind Act requires, according to a new study released by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE).

According to the study, Michigan is one of nearly 20 states that has not implemented a policy linking teacher standards to academic content standards. Without such

a link, the study finds there is no assurance that a teacher is qualified to present the specific material mandated by the state.

The DOE study, entitled "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge," is the first annual report to Congress on the state of teacher quality nationwide, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act, which President George W. Bush signed into law

last January. The study focused on teacher education, testing and certification in each of the 50 states, and discussed the effectiveness of state certification methods.

Teacher certification does not necessarily assure quality. The study cited evidence that teachers who complete the traditional state certification process do not necessarily

TEACHER QUALITY continued on page 2

**Cleveland's school voucher program is constitutional**, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision in June. The decision overturned an earlier appeals court ruling that the First Amendment's Establishment Clause prohibited the program, which gives low-income parents publicly funded vouchers of \$2,250 to help them send their children to a school of their choice. Since the vouchers were issued to the parents instead of directly to the schools, the Supreme Court held that the choice resided with the parent and not the government. The decision clears the way for other cities and states to try similar school choice programs.

**Over 1,500 Michigan schools failed to meet** the state's academic standards, more than in any other state, according to a recent federal report. Michigan school officials say the large number is due to Michigan's tougher standards. Current guidelines state that annual, school-wide student scores should improve by at least 10 percent each on math, reading, science, and writing MEAP tests. Failure to improve in any of the four areas results in a substandard rating. The 1,500 schools are those that have failed to meet this standard for at least two years in a row.

**Detroit public school officials are investigating** whether principals are inappropriately supplementing their salaries with outside grant money. The Detroit News revealed that principals were paid \$2.9 million more than their contract salaries in 2001, even though officials say the principals should not have received some of that extra money. The overpayments include funds for after-school workshops, summer school, and teacher training, but do not include grant money paid directly to schools. The principals' new 12-month contracts, which took effect July 1, eliminate all additional pay for principals but include a total wage increase of 5 percent.

**England's teachers could have pay raises withheld** if they fail annual tests under a new plan announced by government officials. Estelle Morris, the Secretary of State for Education for Great Britain, told the press recently that all teachers must face "a greater challenge" to move up the pay scales. In addition, the government plans to consider higher pay for math and science teachers to help to fill vacancies.



On June 27, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Cleveland school voucher program as constitutional in the *Zelman vs. Harris* case. (See related stories on pages 3 & 12.) Photo courtesy of Institute for Justice.

# Home schoolers face investigation, harassment from government officials

*Critics say home schoolers have academic deficiencies*

While home schooling has become a familiar feature of the national educational landscape over the past several decades, it still meets with a substantial amount of persecution and harassment, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). Recent years have seen a number of instances in which Michigan home schoolers were harassed by public school administrators, local police, and even other families in their neighborhoods or communities.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimates that between 700,000 and 1.25 million children are currently home schooled in the United States. The Michigan State Department of Education says almost 2,000 home schoolers reported to the state last year, a figure that is almost certainly low given the NCES figures.

Government figures on home school families are questionable because of the way they are reported. Michigan law allows parents two options: to operate as a "nonpublic school" and submit enrollment figures

every year, or to operate a home-school education program without reporting to the state. Therefore, the actual number of home school families is likely much higher than state estimates.

Michael Smith, president of the HSLDA, says that a perceived loss of money

HARASSMENT continued on page 4

# "MicroSociety" public school competes for students

The Saginaw Public School District is refurbishing a closed junior high school, the Arthur Eddy Academy, and turning it into a new K-8 magnet school, opening this fall, that will use a nonstandard curriculum called "MicroSociety." The curriculum, in which students collaborate with parents, business volunteers, and teachers to create functioning small communities, is used in more than 200 schools nationwide.

Saginaw administrators are hoping the MicroSociety program will help their district stop a steady flow of student losses—which have averaged 300 per year for several years—resulting from increased competition from charter schools and other districts through Michigan's "schools-of-choice" program. These enrollment losses result in a significant decrease in local funding each year, which has forced the Saginaw district to take steps to improve for its own survival.

The MicroSociety concept was begun in the late 1960s by George H. Richmond, a New York City teacher who became alarmed at his students' lack of enthusiasm for education. Richmond could see that the culture of socio-economically depressed areas not only was depriving his students of the social skills and knowledge they would need to break the cycle of poverty, it also had created a dangerous apathy among students and parents alike about the prospects for improvement.

The program Richmond created in

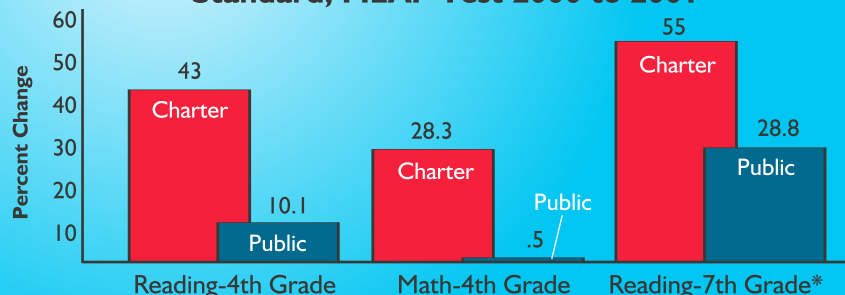
MICROSOCIETY continued on page 2

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Fenton, MI  
Permit # 1776

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

## Education at a Glance

### Increase in the Proportion of Students Meeting State Standard, MEAP Test 2000 to 2001



The percent of students in charter schools meeting state standards is rising much faster than students in traditional public schools.

\*Math-7th Grade not available for 2001

Source: The Education Trust, with data from the U.S. Department of Education and the Michigan Department of Education. Data include schools open for at least two years.

## Teacher Quality

continued from page 1

ily produce superior academic gains in the classroom. A 1999 study by economists Dale Goldhaber and Dominic Brewer, published in the book *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, found that there was no discernable difference in student achievement between those students taught by conventionally licensed teachers and students taught by emergency-hire or temporarily licensed teachers.

The study is especially critical of general education and other “pedagogy” degrees that focus on “teaching strategies” and “the social foundations of education” rather than on the subject matter to be taught. “Research has generally shown that high school math and science teachers who have a major in the subjects they teach elicit greater gains from their students than out-of-field teachers,” the report states.

Although some analyses show positive results from teacher certification, the conclusions of these analyses are increasingly called into question. Last year Kate Walsh, a senior policy analyst at the Baltimore-based Abell Foundation, conducted an analysis of

some 200 studies on teacher certification. From her research she concluded, “The body of research on the effects of teacher certification is astonishingly poor. Some of the most oft-cited studies had such serious flaws that no properly trained researcher would take them seriously.”

Not everyone is pleased with the results of the DOE study, though. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) is calling for an independent analysis of the teacher quality data, saying the report misrepresents information to advance a conservative agenda.

David G. Imig, AACTE president and CEO, said that although the report’s authors are “pushing ‘scientifically based evidence’ on faculties and researchers,” they offer little such evidence, instead repeatedly citing the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and other “conservative researchers.”

Many solutions exist for solving the problems of teacher certification and licensing. While the DOE study clearly favors state certification standards that require competency in the specific academic content to be taught, others believe that a more radical overhaul of teacher certification is in order.

Frederick M. Hess of the Washington,

D.C.-based Progressive Policy Institute’s 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Project, for example, suggests that professional development and on-the-job training in particular should replace the “prescribed sequence” of certification classes, tests and other pre-professional activities.

The Michigan State Board of Education recently convened an “Ensuring Excellent Educators Task Force” to deal with the issues of teacher quality, certification, and requirements imposed by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. The task force was co-chaired by board member John C. Austin and board treasurer Ellen Lappin Weiser. A number of university educators, schoolteachers, parents and other individuals from public agencies and private interests alike were appointed to the panel.

The State Board of Education approved a one-page set of policies at a meeting on April 11, 2002, stemming from the task force’s report. The bulk of the specific recommendations, however, have not been adopted. For example, the report recommended that the state of Michigan “ensure teacher preparation courses are tied to the state’s academic content and curriculum.” Further, the task force recommended that the Michigan Test for Teacher

Certification, the state’s teacher licensure test, be revised to reflect this standard. The Board’s official policies imply that future procedures will be developed later.

The task force also recommended enhancements to teachers’ ongoing professional development, and to “encourage professional development linked to school/district needs and student achievement goals.” The task force contended that this is necessary because “Professional development is not an add-on to the system. It is part and parcel of the work of all educators.” The approved Board policy calls for only “the completion of a practice-based professional development plan based on performance standards” but does not specify its implementation.

It remains to be seen whether the recommendations of the task force, if adopted by the Board of Education, will be sufficient to change the system and make certain quality teachers enter Michigan classrooms. The task force work will likely ensure that the state receives the \$109 million in “Improving Teacher Quality” state grants promised from the federal government as a result of compliance with President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act.

## MicroSociety

continued from page 1

response to this problem is, in essence, a mini-society in which traditional academic subjects are studied in the morning, then applied “on the job” during afternoon program activities. Students spend one hour or one class period each day in their “jobs,” where they learn to run businesses, apply technology, develop government and social agencies, and create cultural and arts organizations. Gradually, students become immersed in the realities of a free-market economy, with taxes, property concerns, income issues, and politics. The school operates an internal economy with its own currency, and students form a legislature that makes laws to govern the society.

As MicroSociety Inc. says on its company web site, “MicroSociety enables teachers to answer two persistent questions students ask: ‘Why do I need to know this?’ and ‘How do I fit in?’”

Several aspects of MicroSociety give inner-city children experiences that expand their perspective and may give them a better chance to participate in mainstream culture. For example, instead of experiencing the legal system from behind a defendant’s or plaintiff’s table, pupils participate in student “courts” and adjudicate and enforce a code of local laws, ordinances, and school rules. By becoming active in lawmaking and enforcement, they see a side of the culture that may help them to avoid lawbreaking and to take advantage of real opportunities in the future.

MicroSociety is structured to integrate with the curriculum used by the school district, which is, in Saginaw’s case, based directly on the Michigan Curriculum Framework, the set of guidelines and

requirements issued by state government. The basic curriculum is the same as in a more traditional school, but emphasis is placed on subjects that are relevant to the society. The motivation for students to learn is greatly increased because success in the society is based on whether they can apply what they have learned in class to their roles. Business owners must be skilled in arithmetic, for example; lawyers and public officials must have public speaking skills; and police officers must know the laws of the society and the school.

“At first, the students are motivated by the extrinsic rewards of MicroSociety,” says Donna Block, who will be MicroSociety coordinator when the Arthur Eddy School re-opens in August. “However, as children experience success in their academic skills, the intrinsic rewards of a job well done translate into a genuine love of learning.”

Implementation of the program begins with teacher and administration training this summer, conducted by MicroSociety professional development staff. The license for the program costs nearly \$100,000 over three years. This provides training at the school for all building administrators and faculty throughout the next three school years as well as support to help integrate the current curriculum with that of the MicroSociety program. MicroSociety also will produce annual reports on the school’s progress for these three years, and the district must employ a full or part time MicroSociety coordinator to administer the program.

The school that inspired Saginaw administrators to adopt the program last summer is William Davison Elementary School outside Hamtramck, where MicroSociety has been in place since 1993. Since adopting the program, Davison school has become both a National and State Blue Ribbon Award winner and has received the

Michigan Golden Apple Award, both awards for student performance on standardized tests. According to recent data, 80 percent of schools that use MicroSociety show enhanced achievement in math, reading, and language arts—increases that are notably greater than the national average annual increase in those three areas. MicroSociety schools also have higher attendance rates and fewer disciplinary problems.

The Saginaw Board of Education recently approved a \$5 million bond issue for construction to remodel the Arthur Eddy School and make it usable for elementary and middle-school students. Small classrooms will be made larger by removing walls, restrooms will be built closer to classrooms, a new media center will be built, and a new cafeteria will replace the swimming pool. Separate doors and drop-off areas for lower elementary, upper elementary, and middle school will be constructed to lighten morning and afternoon traffic congestion. Construction is expected to continue through the year but the school will still open this fall.

As with charter and private schools, students are not assigned to Eddy based on their neighborhood of residence. The Saginaw district’s goal was to attract from 250 to 300 students to the Arthur Eddy school this year, a goal that was reached July 12. Enrollment is open to any student in the district but is focused on bringing in new students from

outside the district. The school does not charge tuition. The district is committed to providing transportation from other schools in the county so students can attend Arthur Eddy. The school will require students to wear uniforms, Superintendent Gerald D. Dawkins recently told the Saginaw News.

MicroSociety skeptics include wary parents, but negative comments are few. The concerns most discussed are the seemingly high cost of the program, the supposed interference with conventional education, and the inequality that the program might create between students in MicroSociety and those attending traditional schools within the district. But MicroSociety seems to be weathering this minor criticism and prospering.

When Michigan’s charter school and “schools-of-choice” laws were debated, the idea that passage would increase competition and force school districts to improve or lose students—and therefore funding—was one of the major arguments in favor of the measures. Saginaw board of education members have made it clear that the purpose of this new school is to directly compete with charter and private schools.

“We need to respond to the needs of our parents and children and give them some options within the school district,” says Gerald D. Dawkins, Saginaw’s superintendent of schools.

## MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

Elizabeth H. Moser  
Managing Editor

Samuel A. Walker  
Editor

Daniel E. Montgomery  
Graphic Designer

Neil Block  
Special Contributor

*Michigan Education Report* is a news and analysis quarterly published by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, research and educational institute devoted to analyzing Michigan public policy issues. *Michigan Education Report* is received by over 130,000 Michigan teachers, administrators, school board members, policy experts, and elected officials. Copyright © 2002. All rights reserved. Permission to reprint any article contained herein is hereby granted provided that *Michigan Education Report*, the author, and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy are properly cited, and a copy of the reprint is sent to the editor. Please contact the editor at

*Michigan Education Report* • 140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568  
Midland, Michigan 48640  
(989) 631-0900 • Fax (989) 631-0964  
www.EducationReport.org • MER@EducationReport.org

## DEBATE WORKSHOPS

### ABOUT THE WORKSHOPS:

Over 7,000 students and teachers have sharpened their forensic skills at Mackinac Center for Public Policy Debate Workshops. This comprehensive one-day program informs debaters on the current debate resolution through expert speakers, hard-to-find resource materials, and in-depth discussions.

**GRAND RAPIDS** Wednesday, September 25th, Eberhard Center  
Grand Valley State University

**MIDLAND** Thursday, September 26th, Valley Plaza Inn, 5221 Bay City Road

**JACKSON** Tuesday, October 1st, Commonwealth Commerce Center, 209 E. Washington

**LIVONIA** Wednesday, October 2nd, Burton Manor, 27777 Schoolcraft Road

**REGISTER TODAY! SEATING IS LIMITED.  
REPLY BY SEPTEMBER 18**

MACKINAC CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY  
140 WEST MAIN STREET • P. O. BOX 568 • MIDLAND, MICHIGAN 48640  
(989) 631-0900 • FAX: (989) 631-0964 • MOSER@MACKINAC.ORG

# Courts uphold, overturn, school choice programs

## U.S. Supreme Court Upholds Cleveland Voucher Program, Poll Shows Michiganders Prefer Education Tax Credits

On June 27, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Cleveland's school voucher program is constitutional. In the long-awaited decision, of *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris*, the

However, the Supreme Court justices held that the government did not endorse any religious school or viewpoint, because parents—not the religious schools—are issued the voucher and make the choice of whether to use it at a public school, a private non-sectarian school or a private religious school.

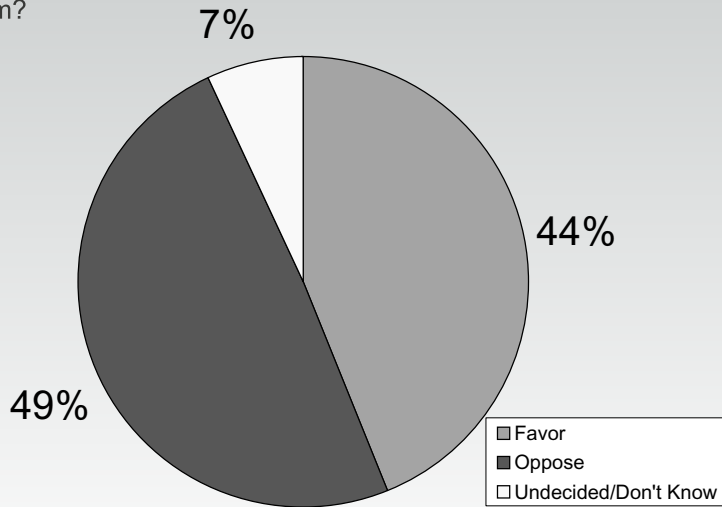
In the decision, Chief Justice Rehnquist

to non-public schools. Some 56 percent are in favor, compared with 34 percent opposed. Such a program has been in operation in Arizona since 1998.

decision on the case.

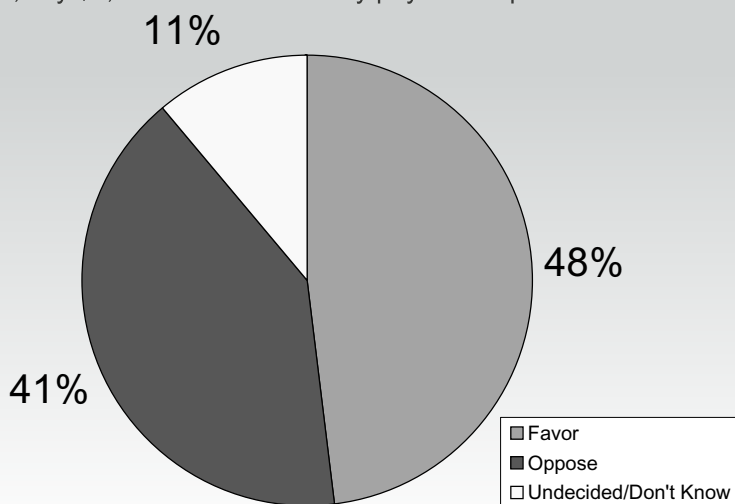
The decision can be read at: <http://199.44.225.4/courtDockets/pdf/CV993370/99-3370-51.pdf>.

**Question:** In the City of Cleveland, Ohio, about 4,000 students of the 57,000 elementary-age children living in the Cleveland School District are enrolled in private schools. Parents of these children receive vouchers worth \$2,250 to help pay the cost of tuition at private schools. The vouchers are funded with tax dollars. If a similar voucher program were put in place in Michigan to be used in school districts like Cleveland that are either poor or have experienced trouble providing a quality education, would you favor or oppose such a program?



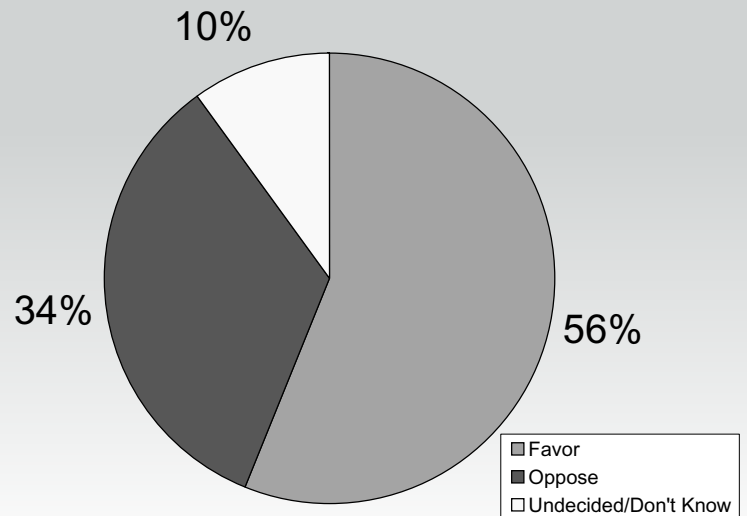
Source: Mackinac Center for Public Policy poll conducted by EPIC/MRA

**Question:** Would you favor or oppose a law that would allow parents of students attending non-public schools to claim a tax credit worth a limited amount, say \$2,000 of the tuition they pay at non-public schools?



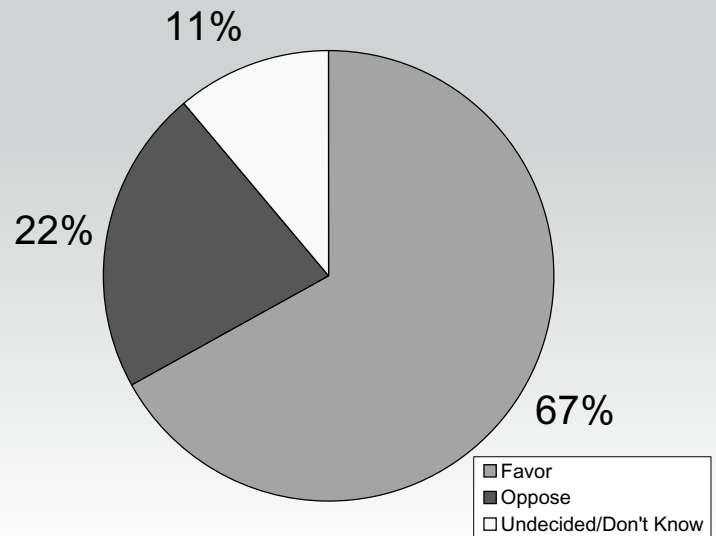
Source: Mackinac Center for Public Policy poll conducted by EPIC/MRA

**Question:** Would you favor or oppose a law that would allow a tax credit for contributions made by individuals or companies to provide scholarship funds for children who attend non-public schools?



Source: Mackinac Center for Public Policy poll conducted by EPIC/MRA

**Question:** Would you favor or oppose a law that would allow a tax credit for contributions made by individuals or companies to provide scholarship funds for children who attend either public or non-public schools?



Source: Mackinac Center for Public Policy poll conducted by EPIC/MRA

justices ruled 5-4 in favor of the voucher program, which provides publicly funded vouchers worth \$2,250 to low-income parents to help send their children to a school of their choice.

The decision overturned an earlier appeals court ruling that the First Amendment's Establishment Clause prohibited the program, since most students used the vouchers to attend religious schools.

wrote for the court, "[T]he Ohio program is entirely neutral with respect to religion. It provides benefits directly to a wide spectrum of individuals, defined only by financial need and residence in a particular school district. It permits such individuals to exercise genuine choice among options public and private, secular and religious. The program is therefore a program of true private choice."

The *Zelman* decision will likely have little immediate bearing on school choice in Michigan, since the state constitution, via a 1970 amendment, prohibits all direct and indirect state government support of non-public schools. In order to have vouchers of any kind in Michigan, the state constitution would need to be amended again.

The decision came on the heels of a new Mackinac Center for Public Policy poll conducted by EPIC/MRA, which indicated that more Michigan voters oppose Cleveland-like vouchers than support them. The poll of 600 active Michigan voters conducted June 19-25 showed that 49 percent of the respondents are opposed to vouchers, compared to 44 percent in favor.

The same poll illustrated that 48 percent of respondents favor an education tax credit so that families can send their children to non-public schools, compared to 41 percent opposed. Education tax credits allow taxpayers to reduce their tax bill when they pay tuition costs to non-public schools. The poll also shows an even wider margin of support for tax credits for individual or corporate contributions to scholarship programs

Support for education tax credits for scholarship granting organizations increases to 67 percent if the scholarships could be used for either public or non-public schools. Some Michigan public schools also charge tuition to non-district students, so such an education tax credit program would benefit students in those circumstances. Only 22 percent of Michigan voters are opposed to such a tax credit program.

In short, a majority of Michigan voters do not approve of Cleveland-like school vouchers, but they are in favor of education tax credits. The full results of the poll may be viewed at: <http://www.mackinac.org/4435>.

The entire decision in the case, *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris*, can be read at: [www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/01pdf/00-1751.pdf](http://www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/01pdf/00-1751.pdf). The decision clears the way for other cities and states to try similar school choice programs.

### Florida Court Strikes Down State Voucher Program

Leon County Circuit Judge P. Kevin Davey ruled on August 5 that Florida's voucher program is unconstitutional.

Davey said the 1999 voucher law violates the state constitution, which prohibits public money from going to churches or other "sectarian institutions."

The voucher program, which is expected to provide \$3,400 vouchers to hundreds of students this coming school year, allows students in failing schools to attend the school of their choice, public or private, including religious schools.

Although Davey's ruling originally barred students from using the vouchers this year, the state sought and won an appeal to allow students to participate in the program until the Florida Supreme Court has the opportunity to review and issue a

### Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals Decision Allows State Scholarships for Religion College Students

The U.S. Court of Appeals, 9th Circuit, issued a decision on July 18 that may have significant implications for school choice programs around the country.

In *Davey v. Locke*, the court struck down a Washington state law that provides college scholarships to certain qualified students, but not to students who choose to study religion or theology. In the case, Joshua Davey (no relation to Judge Davey from previous article) was awarded a Washington state-sponsored "Promise Scholarship," which was revoked when he decided to major in Pastoral Ministries at Northwest College, an accredited institution affiliated with the Assembly of God church.

This decision overruled a state constitutional provision that prohibits the state from giving money to religious schools. Since the state gave scholarship money to other non-governmental schools in this case, the court held that the state could not discriminate against religious schools simply because of their religious viewpoint.

If upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, states with such constitutional provisions would be unable to prevent religious colleges from participating in otherwise neutral school choice programs. In Michigan, the state constitution would likely survive judicial review, since it prohibits such funding for any non-government institution, not just religious institutions.

The decision can be read at: [www.ca9.uscourts.gov/ca9/newopinions.nsf/D3BB2B79B2BAD08688256BFA005882C4/\\$file/0035962.pdf?openelement](http://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/ca9/newopinions.nsf/D3BB2B79B2BAD08688256BFA005882C4/$file/0035962.pdf?openelement).

**Freedom of Speech.  
Freedom of Association.**

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

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

For more information, call the Mackinac Center at 989-631-0900 and ask for your free brochures.

# Harassment

continued from page 1

is why public school officials consider home schooling to "threaten the very existence of public education." Local school districts lose \$6,700 for each student who leaves to be home schooled.

On the other hand, home school students save the state of Michigan money, since they pay taxes earmarked for education, yet they do not send their children to public school. If 2,000 home schooled children in Michigan enrolled in public school this fall, the state would be obligated to pay \$13.4 million more per year, or the basic state foundation grant of \$6,700 for each student to the local school districts.

Smith believes that it is a mistake to underestimate the level of animosity home schooling inspires among some public school advocates. The following incidents, reported by the HSLDA, have been substantiated in police and news reports—but because many families fear further harassment, the parties involved will not be named.

In the fall of 2001, the district attorney for Grand Traverse County threatened a Traverse City family with legal action after they withdrew their children from public school. Communication from the attorney stated that it was evident the family was not teaching according to the state's requirements. Later that year, the same family was visited by a police officer who insisted that the family show him their curriculum. The family refused. The officer warned the parents that he would seek an arrest warrant, and that they would have to serve 90 days in jail if they continued to disobey the district attorney. The HSLDA told the district attorney in writing that this behavior was a violation of the family's rights, and he subsequently dropped the case.

A similar incident occurred in Allegan County last September when a police officer arrived at a home schooling family's residence, demanding to see the curriculum. The mother provided the officer with a copy, which he deemed to be "fine." Nonetheless, the officer reprimanded the mother for not being qualified to teach, to which the mother correctly responded that home schooling parents do not have to be state-certified. The officer replied that during the previous year, the county had arrested "all kinds of home schoolers." The officer left after warning the mother that he would seek an arrest warrant.

An exceptional case is that of a home schooled girl in Hanover who checked her mailbox last year and found a packet of letters from third graders at her local public school. The letters described what public school was like and expressed sympathy

for the girl because she lacked classmates and a traditional school setting. It was later discovered that the students had been instructed by their teacher to write the letters in order to leave a negative impression of home schooling on her students.

According to the HSLDA, this sort of harassment occurs in all states whether home school regulations are absent or extremely restrictive. The HSLDA considers Michigan to be a very low regulation state because the state has a strong parental rights law. "It is the natural, fundamental right of parents and legal guardians to determine and direct the care, teaching, and education of their children," according to the Michigan Compiled Laws Annotated (MCLA) Section 380.10. Other states require high levels of regulations that must be followed prior to home schooling children.

Tennessee, for example, requires parents to notify the school district if they want to withdraw their children from public schools. When a school bus driver in Washington County went to obtain the necessary forms from her supervisor, he became angry at her decision. The next day, she received a notice informing her that she had been fired, giving no reason for her termination. The HSLDA filed a lawsuit against the county and the woman received \$16,500 as settlement for unlawful termination.

California has between four and six high-profile home school harassment cases each year, according to Cathy Cuthbert, editor of The School Liberator, an online newsletter. A school district in San Leandro, for example, decided it would begin to consider home schooled children as truant—and began investigating all home schooling families in that area on the basis of this unwritten district policy. The Hayward (Calif.) Daily Review reported in February 2000 that one home schooling mother in San Leandro was visited by a police officer who pepper-sprayed and arrested her in front of her daughter. Following the incident, the woman's family left town, Cuthbert says, and neither the Daily Review nor the California Homeschool Network has been able to find the family.

Since 1995, as many as 120 students annually from Nine River Falls High School in Washington state have harassed a local home-schooling family by yelling obscenities, breaking bottles on their property, and threatening to riot. Even a small bomb was exploded on the property, leaving a one-foot-deep crater in the family's yard. The homeowner once attempted to scare the crowd away with a shotgun and was later threatened with a charge of illegally brandishing a weapon. The local police department sends only two officers

each year to break up the mob. The family maintains a website featuring their own commentary, comments from the community, court news, and published newspaper articles about their ordeals. Local and web-based news organizations, such as Lewis News (see [www.lewisnews.com](http://www.lewisnews.com)) also have published stories and commentaries about the harassment by both the family and members of the community.

"The harassment has decreased in terms of the percentage of home schoolers that are challenged regarding their practices—but because of the larger number of home schoolers, we deal with more contacts," remarks Smith.

Cuthbert fears that ongoing harassment could be keeping people from starting home schools. "I'm sure it has a chilling effect on people who are considering home schooling," comments Cuthbert.

Besides the threats and harassment home school families face, they also cope with criticisms of home schooling teach-

ing practices. For example, David Stewart, director of Hillsdale College's honors program, told the Detroit Free Press that home schooled children are typically deficient in science education. "I can generally count on them for having almost no science and virtually no lab science," he notes.

The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest school employee union, believes that these educational deficiencies stem from a lack of professional training on the part of the home school parent/teacher. NEA spokesman Charles Erickson told ABC News that teaching is "just like any other profession—you want to get someone who's been taught to do it, so everyone has the same opportunity to learn under a qualified professional."

Nevertheless, despite these threats and harassment, home schooling continues to thrive. According to the Home School Legal Defense Association, it is currently growing across the nation at rates of anywhere from 7 to 15 percent per year.

**HILLSDALE COLLEGE**  
**HOOGLAND CENTER FOR TEACHER EXCELLENCE**  
**Civics Seminars for Teachers**

Public and private middle and high school teachers of civics, social studies, and history  
 November 1-2, 2002 *A More Perfect Union: Teaching the U.S. Constitution*  
 January 17-18, 2003 *Founding Father: George Washington and the American Founding*  
 Seminars are held on the campus of Hillsdale College.  
 \$25.00 registration fee includes on-campus hotel room, all meals, and materials.  
 Faculty include Hillsdale College professors of history and political science, and guest lecturers.

**REGISTER on-line at [www.hillsdale.edu/cte](http://www.hillsdale.edu/cte)**  
**E-mail: [cte@hillsdale.edu](mailto:cte@hillsdale.edu) Phone: 866.824.6831**

**Michigan School Board Leaders Association**

**MSBLA**

Leading the Way...

- In putting parents and children first in education
- In promoting the efficient use of educational resources
- In encouraging innovative, responsible education initiatives
- In quickening the pace of educational improvement

Membership is open to current or former school board members from public or private Michigan schools. Associate memberships are available to others who share the MSBLA mission.

For online membership applications or for information on upcoming training and events, visit [www.msbla.org](http://www.msbla.org) or call 810-658-7667.

**Free markets work!**

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

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

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

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

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

**GREED Introductory Special! \$35**

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

**The Palmer R. Chitester Fund**  
 Stossel in the classroom  
 9008 Main Place, Suite 3  
 McKean, PA 16426

Order Toll-Free Phone: 1-888-242-0563  
 Order Online Web: [www.prcfund.org](http://www.prcfund.org)  
 FAX: 1-814-476-1283 E-mail: [info@prcfund.org](mailto:info@prcfund.org)

Date of Order \_\_\_\_\_  
 Person ordering \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping: One unit \$6.00, Two units \$7.50, Three units \$9.00

Sub Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Shipping \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
**TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**PAYMENT OPTIONS**

Bill my school/organization P.O. # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Enclosed check/money order  
 Visa # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Master Card # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

**MichiganVotes.org**

**Being an informed citizen has never been this easy.**

Your legislator's entire voting record is at your fingertips, 24 hours a day.

**LEGISLATIVE ACTION**

**Funding increase for districts whose students choose other schools**

House Bill 6160, introduced in June by Rep. Richard Brown, D-Bessemer, would appropriate an extra \$4.9 million for small school districts that have lost 20 percent of their students to schools-of-choice programs or to charter or private schools since the 1994-1995 school year.

Supporters of the bill say it is needed to provide stable funding to small districts, whose budgets can be severely affected when a handful of students leave the district, taking their \$6,700 per-student funding with them.

Opponents say the bill will unfairly pay districts for students they are no longer educating.

The bill was referred to the House Committee on Appropriations.

**Increased school funding through cigarette tax hike**

A cigarette tax increase will give

20 additional cents per-pack to the school aid fund, under House Bill 5881, passed by the House and Senate this summer. (See House Bill 5248 at [www.michiganvotes.org](http://www.michiganvotes.org) for text of the bill increasing the tax by 50-cents per-pack.)

HB 5881, sponsored by Rep. Charles LaSata, R-St. Joseph, also would set per-pupil state funding at \$6,700 for the 2003-2004 school year. The bill would guarantee that a \$200 increase from \$6,500 to \$6,700 per-pupil, set to take effect this year, would remain in effect for the 2003-2004 school year.

The bill also will provide \$3.5 million in funding to Upper Peninsula schools that are losing students.

The bill was signed by Gov. Engler in August.

For more information on these and other bills, visit [www.michiganvotes.org](http://www.michiganvotes.org) to view history and analysis by bill number, sponsor, or subject.



**Tony deserves a chance**

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

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

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

For us to help a small group of kids with special learning needs within a resource room will cost \$60,000.00 in a school year. (And next year, the cost will rise.)

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

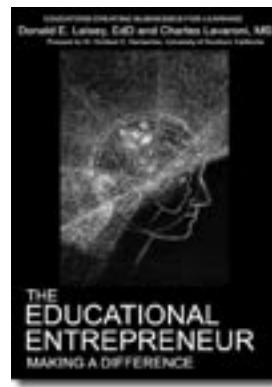
1. If you know of a kid like Tony, a kid whose parents would like him to receive a Christian education—but hasn't because of his special learning needs—please let us know. You can call or write us at the address below. Or fax us at (313) 368-0159.

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

Thank you.



**The Educational Entrepreneur: Making A Difference**  
By Donald E. Leisey, EdD, and Charles Lavaroni, MS



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

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

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

Visit our web site at [www.edentrepreneurs.org](http://www.edentrepreneurs.org)  
1-800-804-0021

**WHAT'S NEXT IN EDUCATION?**

the new journal, *Education Next* offers:

- ◆ engaging features
- ◆ major research findings
- ◆ and forums where contemporary issues are discussed.

It's information you can't afford to miss if you are concerned about the state of education in America.



The mayor of Oakland, Jerry Brown, explains why his city needs a publicly funded military academy.



Ludger Woessmann tells why some nations do better than others in math and science.



What county-fair judge would give a blue ribbon to a so-so cherry pie? According to Tom Loveless and Paul DiPerna, that is exactly what the federal school pickers have done.

**But don't take our word for it!**

For a **free** sample copy or to subscribe, call **1-650-723-3373**, or visit our website at [www.educationnext.org](http://www.educationnext.org)

**WORLD&I**

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

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

**FREE TRIAL ISSUE**

**THE ULTIMATE RESOURCE**

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

**FREE ACCESS TO ON-LINE ARCHIVES**

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

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

W/2861

Keep Your **Free** Subscription!

**Michigan Education Report**

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

# A House of Hope

Year-round school for at-risk girls provides shelter, a strong curriculum and optimism

Nestled in the woods just a few miles from Traverse City is a little-known school making a tremendous difference in the lives of many young women.

The House of Hope is a private Christian boarding school, founded in September 2001, that serves at-risk young girls, ages 12 to 18. The school currently has eight students living and learning on the 40-acre farm estate, which includes a home for the students and school staff, a school building, a barn and a large expanse of woods. Plans are in process to expand the campus to include a gymnasium and dorms for more students.

Many of the school's students come from abusive situations, enter the school struggling with substance abuse, or have dropped out of traditional schools. The school offers a safe haven for the students, providing counseling, a peaceful and structured living environment, and an excellent personalized curriculum. It offers a learning environment in which students are able to regroup emotionally and continue their education. Most return to traditional schooling after about a year at House of Hope.

The House of Hope idea was launched in 1985 in Orlando, Florida and has been replicated by individuals around the country. When it comes to taking troubled girls and returning them to their families able to go on with their lives and their education, House of Hope boasts a 95 percent success rate.

The majority of the Traverse City House of Hope's students find the school through word-of-mouth recommendations from friends or family. Sometimes the school serves as an alternative option for students facing time in juvenile detention centers, but most of the students come to House of Hope voluntarily.

House of Hope is funded entirely by private individuals and businesses. Many local businesses donate services, products and labor to help the school continue operation, and the school hosts fundraisers throughout the year to bring in additional money.

This past year, the House of Hope received an unexpected contribution from the local public school bus drivers' union membership. The members of the union

phases is required to complete a grade level. The program is designed similar to many home school programs, with students working individually from workbooks and textbooks in subjects such as math, literature, social studies, science, economics, and speech. Electives are also offered, such as business math and life skills. All students participate in job shadowing with visiting community leaders from local businesses and organizations.

Students work with the education director (who is the primary teacher) to establish weekly or monthly goals. As students complete phases of their schooling, they receive awards and are allowed more



The House of Hope boarding school in Traverse City is a residential program serving at-risk teen girls.



opted to send the portion of their union dues that is normally allocated for their union's political purposes as charity to House of Hope, a common practice that any public school union member can employ.

House of Hope's curriculum is personalized for each student. Students complete specialized assessment tests when they arrive to place them in the appropriate level, which is called a "phase." Completion of multiple

benefits within the house such as a trip to the store, sleeping in on Saturday, and prizes including facials and CDs.

House of Hope students are in school year-round, which allows those who have dropped out of school to regain lost time and often return to their original grade level by the time they leave House of Hope.

"It's like home schooling in a sense," Barb Hutchins, House of Hope's director

of education, told *Michigan Education Report*. "When we nurture and have high expectations, the students always meet them."

House of Hope students live in and maintain their home, with the assistance of an evening live-in staff and a daytime staff including the school director, teacher, and a counselor. Students share rooms in a dorm-like setting, and daily chores are divided among them.

The school's staff members say the structured, residential nature of the program provides a safe haven for students to recapture a sense of stability and focus on their education.

"Just by taking them out of the situations they were in, they grow by leaps and bounds," Hutchins said.

Students and their families are required to attend regular counseling at the school, and parents are also required to attend weekly parenting classes.

Paula, a 17-year-old student in the program, says the school has made a tremendous difference in her life. After facing the suicide of her brother, Paula had problems with substance abuse and was failing her classes in high school.

House of Hope has provided a stable environment and renewed her interest in learning, she says.

"[This place is] not so much a program, but a family," Paula explained to *Michigan*

*Education Report*. "Not only do you get your own individual education, but you get to learn to have healthy relationships. Now I'm motivated and learning so much."

Paula says the program has also renewed her family, providing parenting skills and building bridges between her family members where there were broken relationships.

"Not only are my parents my guardians, but now they're also my friends. We're learning things about each other we never knew. There used to be tension between us; now there's relief and freedom," she explained.

Ellie Round, founder and executive director of the program says Paula's experience is not unique, and the program lives up to its name.

"The hope that they gain here is incredible," she said.

The House of Hope provides help and a strong education to many troubled teen girls and their families. For more information on the school, visit [www.houseofhopetc.com](http://www.houseofhopetc.com).

# Gubernatorial Candidate Profiles

## Granholt: Pre-school, improving failing schools

Jennifer Granholt has held the office of Michigan's attorney general since 1999. Previously, she served as an attorney for Wayne County and as a federal prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney's office. She is running for governor of the state of Michigan as the Democratic nominee.

If elected, Granholt would expand pre-school education to toddlers and create state-sponsored parent-education programs, which would include state-run parent-child playgroups, childrearing classes for parents, and possible home visits by state officials. The Michigan Education Association (MEA), the state's largest school employees' union, has endorsed her.

Granholt says she would grant more state funding for after-school and summer school programs and reinstate programs recently cut from the state budget. For example, she would like to expand Mentor Michigan, a student-tutoring program founded by Granholt, Michigan First Lady Michelle Engler, and former Detroit Pistons basketball star Isaiah Thomas. She has also proposed the establishment of a

to fund part of her teacher mentoring and training plans.

In response to complaints from school districts regarding deteriorating infrastructure, Granholt says she would raise money for new school buildings, building repairs and modernization through a new "bonding fund," which would provide loans for these purposes. She also wants to change Proposal A, the Michigan school funding plan that transferred the bulk of funding from local entities to the state and substantially lowered property taxes, so that school districts may once again use local millages to increase property taxes for schools. Granholt also says she believes all funding for special education should come from the federal government.

Additionally, Granholt wants all Michigan high school students to fulfill a community service requirement in order to graduate. She advocates changing Michigan's school dropout age from 16 to 18, which would rescind state permission for students to leave school prior to graduation from high school and would withhold



Great Lakes Scholarship Program which would raise scholarship money for post-secondary students.

Granholt's definition of a "failing school" would be guided by an accreditation plan much like the one advocated by state superintendent Tom Watkins and approved earlier this year by the state board of education. The plan relies not only on state achievement test scores, but on factors such as attendance and graduation rates.

To handle failing public schools, she would send in state-sponsored "Turnaround Teams" composed of state education professionals and specialists. State funding would be withheld from the failing school and instead handled by the Team, given to after-school programs, or offered for the transfer of students, at their parents' request, to different public schools. Under the transfer program, the per-student funding for each child would then go to the school the parents choose for their child, instead of going to the failing school. The failing school would be required to create a recovery plan with the assistance of the Turnaround Team.

Granholt favors the creation and funding of new teacher training and development programs, and wants the state to pay the balance on student loans for teachers who agree to teach in specified at-risk schools, or in subject areas where there is a shortage of teachers. In addition to using state money, Granholt would require local governments

driver's licenses from truant students.

Though Granholt sends her own children to private school, she opposes school choice options such as vouchers or education tax credits. She supports choice among traditional public schools, but wants to increase regulations on charter schools (public school academies), and believes no more charter schools should be opened in the state. Currently, there is a cap of 150 university-sponsored charter schools in the state.

A common criticism of Jennifer Granholt's education plan is that it offers no estimate of the level of funding that will be required for her many programs. According to a recent Lansing State Journal editorial, she "doesn't even attempt to attach a dollar figure to any of her proposals, much less advise from where that money would come."

Her opponent, Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus, claiming he is the only "anti-tax candidate" in the race, believes Granholt will support increased taxes, likely through reforms to Proposal A and new programs.

Another criticism is that she has few new ideas. According to the Michigan Information Research Service, seven of the 11 policies she has offered as her plan for education have already been included in recent bills before the Michigan Legislature.

## Posthumus: Teacher training, preserving Proposal A

Dick Posthumus is Michigan's lieutenant governor, a position he has held since 1999. Prior to his election to that office in 1998, he was the Michigan Senate's longest-serving majority leader. Posthumus represented the state's 31<sup>st</sup> Senate district from 1983 until his election as lieutenant governor. He is the Republican Party's candidate for governor of Michigan.

Posthumus' most oft-stated educational goal is to have every Michigan child reading at grade level by the third grade. To meet this goal, Posthumus wants to pool the funds that support the state's many programs for at-risk children into programs that would

economy and in turn provided a larger state budget for education.

Posthumus has supported measures that would allow parents a greater choice in which school their children attend. As a state senator he was one of the primary sponsors of the bill that resulted in Michigan's charter school law, which Gov. Engler hailed as "the nation's most far-reaching charter school legislation." The 1993 bill established Michigan as one of the nation's leaders in charter schools, which now serve over 66,000 students in 186 charter schools. More recent legislation placed strict limits on the number of schools allowed.



focus on teaching children to read. He wants to institute a government-funded campaign to find, hire and retain high-quality school principals who will take charge of failing schools and make them work. And he wants to initiate training programs for principals, similar to state-sponsored teacher training programs already in place.

The Republican candidate has called for greater state funding of pre-school programs, and, like his opponent, Democratic nominee Jennifer Granholt, wants to see the federal government pay for all the special education services it requires states to perform.

At the same time that he wants to encourage schools to spend money more efficiently, Posthumus wants to further increase the amount of per-pupil funding for schools, which will be raised to \$6,700 per-student next year (a \$200 increase over the 2002 amount). He has vowed that as governor, he will never cut or freeze the minimum amount of per-pupil funding.

In Michigan, less than half of school employees are actually teachers—one of the lowest teacher-to-non-teacher ratios in the nation—a statistic many regard as an indicator of top-heavy bureaucracy. Posthumus says he wants to spend fewer school funds on administration, and more on what actually goes on in the classroom.

Posthumus regards Proposal A, the 1994 tax reform plan that shifted most education funding from local to state government, as a salutary measure because it lowered property taxes, reduced funding inequities between districts, and increased the amount of money going to Michigan schools. He opposes any attempt to raise local taxes by changing the proposal, which he has defended ever since he sponsored the plan in the early 1990s. In this, as on other tax issues, Posthumus points out that throughout his Senate career and as lieutenant governor, he has fought for lower taxes, which he believes have improved the

Posthumus was also the founder of the K-12 private scholarship foundation now called the Education Freedom Fund. Today the fund gives scholarships to over 4,000 low-income students to attend private schools. Posthumus supported Michigan's 2000 voucher initiative as lieutenant governor, breaking ranks with Gov. Engler, who opposed the measure.

Despite his historically unqualified support for school choice, Posthumus disavowed vouchers recently, saying also that school choice that includes non-government schools would not be a focus of his administration.

Posthumus helped establish both the Michigan Education Savings Program (MESP) and the Postsecondary Access Student Scholarship (PASS). The MESP is a state-run savings program in which parents can save tax-deductible funds for tuition, room and board, and other college expenses for their college-bound children. The PASS, which hasn't shown the same degree of success as the MESP, is a state-funded scholarship program that pays tuition for low-income students trying to earn two-year degrees. Of the \$10 million allotted for PASS this year, \$8 million has been transferred to university maintenance accounts.

Critics of Posthumus say his refusal to change Proposal A will limit the ability of school districts to raise additional funding through increased taxes. Granholt says there is little Posthumus is trying to do that she hasn't already done in her term as attorney general. Other critics are concerned about Posthumus' refusal to make school choice programs such as vouchers or tax credits a part of his platform.

# School property taxes could increase \$5.5 billion over 10 years

## Study analyzes new legislation to liberalize sinking fund laws

Legislation that would liberalize the allowable uses for school sinking funds (House Bill 4824) could cost Michigan taxpayers nearly \$5.5 billion over the next 10 years, according to a new study sponsored by the Michigan Chamber Foundation and conducted by Anderson Economic Group, a Lansing-based consulting firm. The new law would allow an additional five mills in local property taxes to be levied for sinking fund programs.

Sinking funds are a way to set aside money to repay principal on a debt when a lump sum comes due. Under current law, schools can maintain permanent sinking funds for future capital projects, like buying real estate, constructing new buildings, or repairing existing structures. These funds also allow schools to have money on hand for emergency repairs, such as replacing a leaky roof.

Local voters approve sinking fund millage taxes on property. One mill equals \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of taxable value. Therefore, a one-mill tax on a \$100,000 home that has a taxable value of \$50,000 produces \$50 per year in revenue.

Under current law, sinking funds cannot be used for regular school operating expenses. The new legislation, sponsored by Rep. Doug Hart, R-Rockford, seeks to change this. In addition to the current allowable uses of sinking fund monies, these resources could be used to furnish buildings, purchase school equipment, and acquire technology. These costs would normally be paid out of general operating funds.

According to the Michigan Chamber Foundation study, HB 4824 would "increase the taxing powers of local school districts beyond those allowed when Proposal A passed.... For businesses and other taxpayers paying 18 mills in local taxes plus six mills in state taxes now, a 5-mill increase would represent more than a 20 percent tax increase." Proposal A increased funding and established a per-pupil funding guarantee for Michigan's public schools, and increased the state sales tax. It also reduced per-pupil funding disparities between districts.

"The increased flexibility in the use of sinking fund revenues under this proposal could result in the approval of more sink-

ing funds and thus increase property taxes for residents approving these proposals," writes Joe Carrasco, Jr. Carrasco wrote a fiscal analysis on the bill for the nonpartisan Senate Fiscal Agency last February.

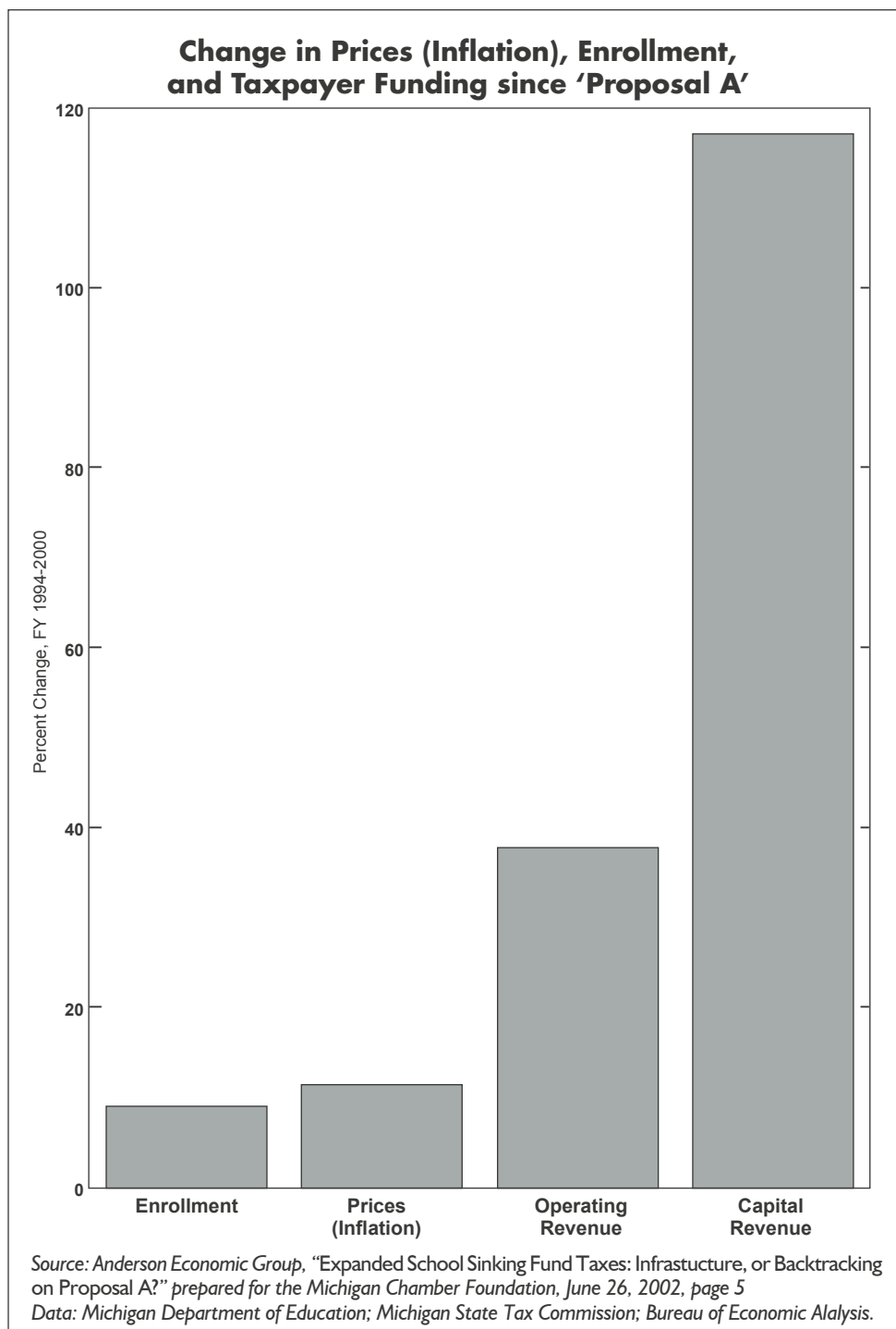
These concerns notwithstanding, HB 4824 enjoys broad bipartisan support, including endorsements by both gubernatorial candidates, Dick Posthumus and Jennifer Granholm. On Dec. 13, 2001,

the bill passed the House 95-2. Also, the proposal has the support of influential education organizations, such as the Michigan Association of School Administrators.

The study underscores how much capital revenue for schools has skyrocketed since passage of Proposal A. Capital revenue includes both sinking funds and the proceeds from other bond debt for building and site expenses. Since Proposal A was enacted in 1994, capital revenue has more than doubled. Meanwhile, operating revenue has grown by less than 40 percent, and general price or inflationary changes have been far less than 20 percent (see graph).

The report concludes that if the legislation induces localities to slowly increase property taxes after 2003, property tax revenue statewide could increase anywhere between \$3.3 billion and \$7.6 billion over 10 years. A midrange assumption in their calculations shows \$5.5 billion in new property taxes over 10 years.

The bill has moved to the state senate, and it has been referred to the Senate Education Committee, chaired by Sen. Loren Bennett, R-Canton.



**Ask the Debate Coach**  
Expert Debate Help Is Only 48 Hours Away

Preparing your case for a competitive debate season? Looking for evidence you can use to deliver a body blow to the other side? In the world of debate, persuasive evidence and the ability to anticipate the other side's arguments are the keys to success.

To help you build your arsenal of influential facts, you can Ask the Debate Coach, an on-line expert who will answer your questions and put you on the trail to in-depth research on this year's topic, governmental policy toward weapons of mass destruction. Simply point your browser to [www.mackinac.org/3620](http://www.mackinac.org/3620) and click the Ask the Debate Coach icon.

It's FREE.  
A personal e-mail reply will be provided within 48 hours.

# CLEANING... FOR KIDS

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

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

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

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

**800-632-1221**

**e-mail**

**"YOU HAVE THE BEST EDUCATION NEWS SUMMARIES IN YOUR INBOX"**

From: Michigan Education Digest

Back issues of *Michigan Education Digest* are now available on-line. Just point your browser to [www.educationreport.org/pubs/med](http://www.educationreport.org/pubs/med).

Michigan Education Digest delivers FREE weekly email summaries of the hottest education stories from dozens of Michigan and national newspapers, magazines, and reports.

Sign up for free at [www.EducationReport.org](http://www.EducationReport.org)



COMMENTARY

# School choice: New Zealand's reforms leave U.S. behind



**Matthew Ladner, Ph.D.**

While Americans continue to debate the issue of parental choice in education, it has gone little noticed that school choice is common overseas. All the nations of Western Europe (excluding Italy and Greece), for example, provide public funds to help make private schools a viable option for low-income families, and the newly elected Italian government has pledged to create a voucher program. The Netherlands has had a comprehensive school choice program since 1917, other than the 1940-1945 period when the country was occupied by Nazi Germany.

While the Soviet bloc generally forbade the existence of private schools in the interests of creating the "New Soviet Man,"

a number of former communist countries have created school-choice programs since becoming democracies. Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, the Ivory Coast, and South Africa have school-choice programs as well.

But the one foreign example most likely to shed light on the American experience is New Zealand, which adopted a bold school-choice program a decade ago. The results should inspire American education reformers.

New Zealand may seem like a small country a world away, but it is fairly comparable to an American state. New Zealand's population is roughly that of Kentucky's. Like the United States, New Zealand is a diverse country with significant minority populations, primarily Maori and Pacific Islanders. On average, New Zealand's minority students are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, and they do not score as well on standardized exams as a group. The United States spends about twice as much per student as New Zealand. In 1999, the per-capita income in New Zealand was \$16,427, while in the United States the per-person income was \$28,518. If New Zealand were an American state, it would rank 51st out of 51 states in per-capita income.

Before the reforms, New Zealanders were as fed up with their public schools as many Americans are today. A huge and unresponsive administrative apparatus absorbed a large amount of education spending. Starting in the late 1980s, a series of reforms put into place by both left- and right-of-center governments downsized the education bureaucracy, turned the governance of public schools over to elected boards of parents, abolished local attendance zones, and obligated schools to compete for students.

The administration and economics of schools completely changed. Parents were now in charge of making school decisions, and parents now choose the best schools for their children. In American terms, we might say that New Zealand transformed all public schools into charter schools. In addition, the government provides financial assistance for students wishing to attend private schools.

Before the reforms, only 30 percent of New Zealand education spending reached

the classroom in the form of teacher salaries and student materials (the figure is less than 50 percent for public schools in the United States.) Today, 67 percent of all education spending reaches the classroom. Parents now carefully choose which schools their children will attend, and New Zealand schools eagerly compete for the best teachers.

Quality teachers, rather than serving as cogs in a massive bureaucratic structure, are now highly sought-out professionals. Formerly frustrated parents now have options: Either the schools meet the needs of their children, or else the parents can seek schools that will do so.

Despite the fact that New Zealand spends much less per student than the United States, the island nation trounced the United States in recent international tests of math and science achievement. New Zealand seniors scored 22 points above the international average, while American seniors scored 39 points below that same average on the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) math exams. New Zealand's scores rank with those of the best European and Asian nations. By comparison, American seniors score lower than any other economically advanced nation.

The New Zealand experience demonstrates that competition for students increases the bang for your education buck. When parents have the ability to shop around for the best school for their children, schools are obliged to spend more money on, for instance, high-quality teachers and less on cumbersome bureaucracy.

New Zealand's reforms have something for both sides of the debate: for parents, more choice and better academic performance; for teachers, better pay, working conditions, and prestige. While America has generally been a world leader, much of the rest of the world has been waiting for us to figure this one out.

*Matthew Ladner, Ph.D. serves as the director of policy and communications at Children First America, a Bentonville, Ark.-based non-profit organization that supports parental choice in education. To learn more, visit: [www.childrenfirstamerica.org](http://www.childrenfirstamerica.org). This article originally appeared in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, in Richmond, Va.*

**Keep your Free Subscription!**

Subscribe on-line at [www.educationreport.org](http://www.educationreport.org) or send your name and address to the address on page 2.

Teachers...



## Lessons from the Great Depression.

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

Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568  
Midland, Michigan 48640  
(989) 631-0900 • Fax (989) 631-0964  
[mcpp@mackinac.org](mailto:mcpp@mackinac.org)

**MER**  
Online Edition



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

**Some AAE members speak out -**

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

Tracey Bailey  
1993 National Teacher of the Year

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

Dr. Lewis Hodge  
Professor of Education,  
University of Tennessee

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

Guy Doud  
1987 National Teacher of the Year

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

Sandra Lastra  
1995 Outstanding New Mexico  
Teacher of the Year



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

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



**It's the difference between a college diploma... and a college education.**

College students are challenged with issues that go far beyond facts and formulas. Sure, students need to pursue academic excellence. They must acquire the knowledge and skills our high-tech society demands of them. *But there is more.*

Cornerstone students develop their own ability to think critically or with discernment, their own grasp of biblical Christianity, and their own desire to live the Christian life.

**Cornerstone®**  
UNIVERSITY

65 academic programs in arts, sciences, and professional studies

Grand Rapids • Detroit • Kalamazoo • Muskegon  
1.800.787.9778 • [www.cornerstone.edu](http://www.cornerstone.edu)

# Which Educational Achievement Test is Best for Michigan?

## A Comparison of the MEAP, SAT-9, and ITBS



**Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D.**

The past generation of students in Michigan has taken the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test to gauge their academic competency in five basic subject areas: mathematics, reading, science, social studies and writing.

The MEAP test is not the only option for the Michigan Legislature to consider. A number of commercial firms publish high-quality, low-cost educational achievement tests that could potentially replace the MEAP. The following compares the MEAP to two commercial achievement tests: the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT-9) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), and analyzes the benefits and costs of each test.

### The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)

Some 25 years ago, the Michigan Revised School Code and the later-passed State School Aid Act of 1979 directed that school standards and accountability testing be used to gauge the academic achievement of all Michigan students. Since then, the MEAP has been adjusted periodically to conform to the state's educational standards.

As noted above, the MEAP exams are given to students in five basic subjects for students in grades 4-11, as follows:

- Reading (grades 4, 7, and 11)
- Mathematics (grades 4, 7, and 11)
- Social Studies (grades 5, 8, and 11)
- Science (grades 8 and 11)
- Writing (grade 11)

An advantage of the MEAP is that it is aligned with state standards and uses performance levels to grade the outcome. For example, in the 11th grade (high school) test the MEAP uses four levels to determine proficiency: Exceeded Michigan Standards (Level 1), Met Michigan Standards (Level 2), Basic (Level 3), and Unendorsed (Level 4). These performance levels give parents and policy-makers more understanding about what the test scores mean.

The Michigan standards themselves, however, have been roundly criticized for being unduly vague and broad. Well-structured education standards should be focused on year-by-year learning, and be rigorous, intelligible and measurable, so that teachers and parents alike know what is expected each year. The Michigan Department of Educa-

tion should consider reviewing California's standards as the model of quality for math and reading.

Another issue is the cost of the MEAP exams. According to a report from noted Harvard economist Caroline M. Hoxby, the costs per pupil are lower in Michigan than in other states; however, this is partially because of the infrequency of the exams. Also, students don't begin MEAP testing until the fourth grade, so there is no objective way of ascertaining how well a child, school, or school district is performing, compared to his or her peers in other parts of the state, until that grade.

Further, there is no way to gauge year-to-year changes in subject performance. If a particular student is doing well in fourth grade reading, there is no objective measure of reading mastery again for that student until the seventh grade. If that student's reading achievement had begun to slip in the fifth grade, for example, this objective measurement of achievement would not be able to help his or her teachers zero in on the nature of the deficiency.

Under new federal standards (see below), and under legislation pending in the Michigan House, some of these shortcomings will be remedied—and the cost will rise—as more grades are tested.

### Alternatives: The Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills

Two of the more popular alternatives to the MEAP are the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT-9), published by Harcourt Educational Measurement, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), published by Riverside Publishing/Houghton Mifflin. Both companies offer tests in a number of subject areas including reading, mathematics, language, science and social studies, among others, and these are packaged into a comprehensive battery of tests.

These are both norm-referenced tests; that is, the score results are standardized so they can be easily compared. Both tests report scores as percentile ranks. For example, a student who scores at the 50th percentile has a higher level of achievement than 50 percent of his or her peers nationwide. One advantage of this system over a state-based test like the MEAP is that it allows the state as a whole to compare itself to the nation in terms of academic achievement.

School officials may also ask for "performance standard scoring" already used by the MEAP. The SAT-9 offers four levels of performance (Level 1 through Level 4), which look analogous to the Michigan performance levels (below satisfactory, partial

mastery, solid performance, and superior performance for Levels 1-4, respectively).

The questions used in both of these tests are drafted using nationally recognized curriculum standards as their guide. For example, questions for the SAT-9 reading test are written using criteria from the National Assessment of Educational Progress; science test questions are drafted according to National Science Education Standards drawn by the National Research Council (a division of the National Academy of Sciences), etc.

A number of states use one of these tests as their state benchmark test. For example, at least part of the SAT-9 is used by Arkansas, Arizona, California, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Utah and West Virginia as their state assessment.

There are at least five major advantages for Michigan in using a commercial test such as the ITBS or SAT-9.

1. Flexibility: The comprehensive battery of tests comes with a range of tests that may be chosen by the state. For example, the ITBS' complete battery of tests includes reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies and science, among others. School administrators and policy-makers may pick and choose which assessments will be given.

2. Comparability: Percentile ranking scores can show how well the entire state is performing in these subjects compared to the nation as a whole. The MEAP lacks any kind of national comparability.

3. Political Neutrality: Michigan and many other states experience considerable political turbulence over K-12 curriculum standards, test content and methodology. The number of interest groups to satisfy is immense, the debate heated and emotional, and the stakes significant, especially when the availability of school funding and student scholarships are contingent upon the results. Adopting a widely respected commercial test can avoid many political battles, and may even increase public confidence in the state's performance assessment.

4. Value: By one calculation, it costs up to \$22 per student to administer and score the MEAP exam. If a set of reusable SAT-9 or ITBS test booklets is purchased for the population of Michigan public school children in grades 4-8 (almost 640,000 students), there would be a one-time cost of approximately \$2.8 million (\$4.40 for each test booklet for the SAT-9—the ITBS has a similar cost structure). Machine-readable answer sheets would add another half million dollars each year (about \$0.81 per sheet). Scoring the tests each year would add between \$1.95 and \$5.90 per student

(between \$1.25 and \$3.78 million per year), depending on which reports the state desires.

In all, the program would cost at most \$7.1 million for the first year and not quite \$4.5 million in subsequent years (in 2001 the state spent about \$16.4 million on testing), assuming the state doesn't negotiate any kind of scale discount from the publisher. This equates to slightly more than \$11 per tested student in the first year and \$7 thereafter. A study of Georgia's testing system showed similar savings if that state used a private test. These estimates are in line with other states that use a commercial test. For example, West Virginia, which uses the SAT-9, spends about \$12 per student on its testing program each year.

5. Compliance with federal law: The "No Child Left Behind" bill, signed into law last January by President Bush, mandates that all states show yearly progress in improving academic achievement. The percentile rankings of the SAT-9 or ITBS could probably be used by states to show such progress, whereas the MEAP cannot.

There are two disadvantages the Michigan Legislature will have to weigh in choosing a commercial test as opposed to the MEAP.

1. Standards: The state of Michigan would lose the ability to match its own academic standards to the test used. This may not be a significant disadvantage, given the merit of the earlier criticism of Michigan's standards.

2. Long-term Use: The state would, essentially, be "starting over" in its educational assessment program. If the MEAP, which has been used for decades now, is replaced, little if any of the information gathered from these decades of testing could be used to help guide educational decision makers. There would be no way MEAP test scores could be accurately compared to SAT-9 or ITBS test scores because they are different tests with at least slightly different standards and objectives.

Ultimately, in the debate over testing student achievement, the Michigan Legislature will have to decide whether it is willing to lose some control in order to get more value and flexibility out of its academic testing program.

*Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D. is director of education policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute in Midland, Michigan. For more information, visit [www.mackinac.org](http://www.mackinac.org).*

## TeachersforChoice



*Are you a public school teacher who supports parental choice in education?*

*Do you want more choices in how you practice your profession?*

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

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

**TeachersforChoice.org**

# The Value of Asking Questions: One Parent's Experience with Her Child's School



Patricia Alspach

Too many parents are patronized or met with obfuscation when they complain about problems with their schools. If they persist in their complaints, they are eventually accused of being "against the schools."

Before I tell you of my public school experience, let me make clear something I shouldn't have to say: I am not against public schools. I am against incompetent schools, public or private.

When I enrolled my first-born child in public school in 1987, I knew the schools had drastically changed since my five siblings and I had attended back in the 1950s and 60s. The facilities were newer, had computers, air conditioning and carpeting. There were separate music, science, gym, cafeteria and art rooms along with specialized teachers and noon aides for those rooms. Instead of 40 students crammed into a small classroom, my child's class averaged 23 students in large rooms with round tables. Special learning stations were placed around the room so children could work at their own pace.

Seeing all these things, I couldn't believe my child's good fortune at being able to attend such a wonderful public school. I'd been told, "Feel free to ask questions." So, I did.

"Why don't the children use lined paper to print the alphabet?" I asked.

The teacher's explanation had something to do with "small motor skills" (motor skills of small children? Motor skills for handling small objects? The skills of small motors?) and "developmental learning." The jargon threw me off balance and made me ashamed to admit my ignorance. Like so many other parents, I just smiled and nodded my head.

That was the beginning of my asking questions of the system. Over the next few years I was introduced to many concepts, such as "whole language," "invented spell-

ing" (*invented spelling?*), "Reading Recovery," "cooperative learning," and "self-esteem education."

Parents who are really listening, when exposed to such terms, begin to hear the first faint alarm bells—that queasy feeling in the gut that says something could be very wrong here. But they usually can't put their finger on what it is, and certainly have no idea what to do about it.

That feeling gets worse when they begin hearing about things that sound fine, but are difficult to define, like "animal rights," "multiculturalism," "values clarification," and report cards without grades. After a while, even innocuous-sounding terms like "hands-on learning," "constructivism," and "child-centered learning" begin to sound sinister.

Rightly or not, I think I might even have tolerated these emphases in the curriculum and pedagogy if their use or inculcation had been secondary to the learning of basic academic skills. But such was not the case. In fact, I couldn't detect many basic academic skills being directly taught or learned at all. Too many kids couldn't read the actual words on the pages of their books. Spelling was atrocious on papers proudly displayed in the school halls. Schoolwork came home uncorrected, messy, and plastered with "good work" stickers.

When I questioned my firstborn's lack of reading, spelling, and printing ability, I was told my child just wasn't ready to read, and that all those skills would eventually appear.

I was worried, so I bought workbooks for home use. I hired tutors immersed in the school's pedagogy. A thorough pediatric exam including eyes, ears and brain showed no physical problems. When I confessed to other parents my worry about my child's apparent (to me, but not to the teachers) failure to learn, I found that I wasn't the only one with this problem. Friends admitted to me that their children didn't seem to be learning much either.

Still, our thinking was intimidated by

the sheer authority of the public school establishment. My child wasn't learning, but what did I know? The teachers and schools were the experts. I was just a mother, after all. Never mind that I had lived in four countries, had a B.A. in English, and was a former insurance investigator for fraud, product liability and medical malpractice. To them, I was just a mom.

And then one day, something happened. It was a small thing—a mom sort of thing, actually—one of those little epiphanies that make things suddenly, perfectly clear.

The school used tempera paint for art projects, which stains clothes permanently. My child was coming home with ruined clothes. When I complained, the teacher advised me to talk to the principal. I approached him with trepidation—who was I to bother the principal of the school with something as trivial as ruined clothes?

But I asked him: "Why doesn't the school use washable paint?" His unbelievable reply: "There is no such thing as washable paint."

I was dumbfounded. Of course there's paint that is washable! I buy it all the time for my children. When I told him he was in error, he said, "Well, you're the only one to complain." Later, I called friends and discovered that plenty of mothers had complained to this man and had gotten nowhere. He was lying to me.

Catching my child's school principal in this seemingly trivial lie had a profound effect on my thinking, and on my assessment of the authority of the public schools. I realized they were run by people, people who were eminently fallible, and that I had every right to question what seemed off-base to me.

It took a few years of asking questions and conducting my own independent research, but over time I discovered the value of asking questions that elicit important information about your child's education.

I invite you moms and dads out there to use these ideas the next time you talk with your child's public or private school teacher or principal:

- What kind of reading program is used? The "whole language" method of teaching reading and spelling—teaching children to recognize whole words and their placement in relation to other words—has never, ever

out-performed the traditional method, which now goes by the name of "phonics" and teaches the building blocks of words, grammar and sentences. "Whole language" has, however, been repeatedly blamed for poor reading and comprehension among students.

- Do the teachers correct spelling mistakes on student papers? Invented spelling (phonetic spelling out of words the way children think they would be spelled) should only be permitted until the second semester of first grade. After that, all mistakes should be corrected by the teacher so they don't become ingrained.

- Is memory work required in the curriculum? Rote memorization doesn't impair creativity or understanding.

- Does the school stress child-centered learning or direct instruction? Direct instruction works better and faster than letting children figure out things for themselves.

- When and how are letter grades assigned? "Need to improve" doesn't give the same information, nor does it convey the proper sense of urgency, as an "F" on a report card. Letter grades should be issued by the first grade.

- How is the classroom seating arranged and assigned? When students sit at round tables instead of individual desks, they cheat. At any one time, as the teacher walks about the room, her back is turned toward a fourth of her students. That's when all sorts of mischief takes place.

What is most important is to work with your child and his or her school. Parents should be vigilant, check all of their children's schoolwork, compare what their children are learning with what they learned at that age, and talk to other parents.

Just one result of my labors: I taught my youngest child to read before Kindergarten. And guess what? It wasn't difficult at all.

*Patricia Alspach is a writer who lives with her husband and two children in Farmington Hills, Michigan.*



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

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

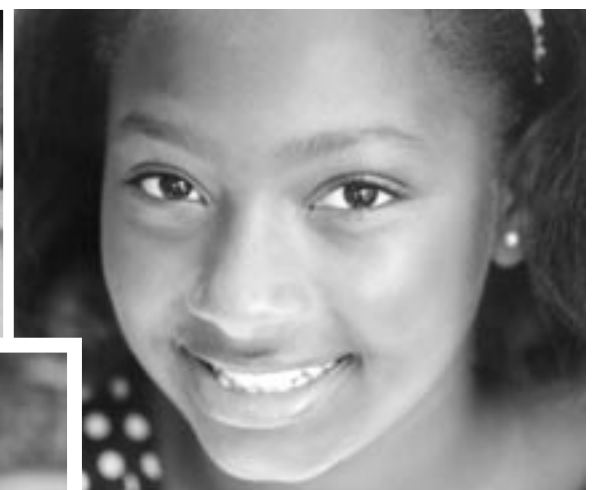
- Tuition-free charter schools, accessible to all.
- Safe, modern, stimulating environment.
- Challenging academic standards, back-to-basics approach.
- Universal moral principles woven into daily lessons.
- Certified, respected, well compensated teachers.
- Strong, consistent parental involvement.

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

We welcome your questions and concerns.

**National Heritage Academies**

080 Spaulding Ave. SE Grand Rapids, MI 49540  
Phone: 616-222-1700 or 1-800-666-9235  
www.heritageacademies.com



Giving Parents a Choice.



Giving Children a Chance.

*Education Freedom Fund is a private scholarship program that offers tuition assistance to low-income families in Michigan.*

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

## Diverse Viewpoints

# Did the Supreme Court make the right decision in upholding school vouchers?

*Decision could damage both public and private education*

Unfortunately, as is often the case in the educational reform policy arena, there is a serious disconnect between the issues which need to be dealt with and the solutions put forth. To that point, the ruling by the Supreme Court on the Cleveland vouchers program is very disappointing and could prove to be quite damaging to America's public and private education system in years to come. Too many public officials and policy gurus advance vouchers as the "silver bullet" to improve America's public schools, but in reality, vouchers may hurt both public and private schools.

To many, the idea of vouchers may sound good initially but is quickly deflated when carefully analyzed. Every state, given the choice of vouchers on state ballot initiatives, has overwhelmingly voted it down. Consider the reality that approximately 46 million students are currently enrolled in America's public elementary and secondary schools. Private and parochial schools accommodate about 6 million students. A simple mathematical exercise will immediately point out that the numbers don't work! In effect, a voucher system, regardless of the amount of money provided, can only accommodate a minimal number of public school students. To think of vouchers as a credible solution to the problems of public education is to disregard most of America's students. In Cleveland it proves false by the fact that the majority of students receiving vouchers were already attending private institutions, with 96% of those institutions being religious schools.

To be clear, opposition to vouchers does not demean the outstanding hard work and accomplishments that are evident in our nation's private and parochial schools. Rather, this is an issue of fairness, equity and the reality that any diversion of public funds will negatively affect the majority of public school students who are left behind.

States are required to provide a free and public education for each child. The operative words here are *free*, *public* and *required*, and the mandate is a commitment to access and equity in elementary and secondary education. Most private and parochial schools use various tests and/or admissions procedures in selecting students, which, if continued under a publicly funded vouchers system, would constitute an unfair and unjust situation. Public schools accept all children, regardless of academic readiness, race, socio-economic status, limited English proficiency or special education needs. Therein lies the power of the public system of education – it is truly public!

Over the years, the public education system in this country has fought some long, hard battles to ensure educational equity for student populations often ignored and discriminated against. Are private and parochial schools ready to make the same commitment to educating all students? Are they prepared to be held accountable for the use of public voucher dollars? A voucher system utilizing public funds should never be allowed to discriminate against special needs students.

And what impact will vouchers have on the mission of private and parochial schools? Most likely, the initial reaction of private and parochial schools to vouchers would be positive: more students and more fiscal resources. But, it can be predicted that over time, as more public dollars are spent to support voucher students, there will be increased pressure for greater public scrutiny and accountability for these public expenditures. Private and parochial schools are an important part of the heritage and future of American education. Slowly but surely, vouchers will force these schools to become less private and less parochial—the very reason for their existence.

Proponents of vouchers say that public schools will become more competitive and more accountable operating within a voucher system that allows students the option to leave. The reality is that for every public school student that leaves, districts lose significant dollars that are never replaced. It seems illogical to suggest that school districts, especially urban districts already plagued with significant fiscal problems, will improve as public education funds are removed.

If our national commitment is to educate all children to high standards, then our school reform efforts must include strategies and initiatives that are comprehensive, built upon solid research and designed to serve all the students. Recent reform efforts that show great promise for all students include: establishing high academic standards; aligning curriculum and instruction with established standards and assessments; improving the preparation, induction and career opportunities for school leaders and teachers along with salary increases; ensuring high quality pre-school and early childhood education; increasing parental involvement; implementing rigorous tests to monitor student progress; holding schools accountable (when supported with the necessary resources) for improved student achievement; determining consequences for both successful and failing schools; and financing the poorer school districts in a more equitable manner.

In summary, vouchers lead us away from the basic American tradition of a free, quality public education for every student and undermine the kind of comprehensive, systemic school reform that is working in many parts of the country right now. No one wants to deny students and parents the right to a better school system, but silver bullet solutions for small groups of students is not reform. I remind those who advocate vouchers that the American dream of equity and excellence in education is intended for all students and not the select few that a misguided public policy of school vouchers will serve.

Gerald N. Tirozzi, Ph.D., is executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in Virginia. Dr. Tirozzi was appointed by President Clinton as Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education, and served in that capacity from 1996 to 1999 at the U.S. Department of Education. For more information on NASSP, visit [www.principals.org](http://www.principals.org).



Gerald N. Tirozzi, Ph.D.

**NO**



Michael Heise, Ph.D.

**YES**

*Decision is good news for choice advocates and Cleveland school children*

After decades of often animated conjecture and debate, the Supreme Court concluded in *Zelman* that Cleveland's publicly-funded voucher program is constitutional. The Court's long-awaited decision is good news for choice advocates in general and thousands of low-income Cleveland school children in particular. In its 5-4 decision the Court reversed the Sixth Circuit Court's conclusion that the Cleveland voucher program violates the First Amendment's prohibition on the establishment of religion. Writing for the Court, Chief Justice Rehnquist concludes that the Cleveland voucher program does not put the government in the unconstitutional position of sponsoring religious indoctrination. Justices O'Connor, Scalia, Kennedy and Thomas joined on the Court's opinion.

A full picture of *Zelman's* impact on school choice will not emerge for some time. Although five Justices signed the majority opinion, the numerous concurring and dissenting opinions evidence a divided Court. Despite the complicated nature of this decision, however, four points are already clear.

First, *Zelman* will prove important for the way other voucher programs are structured. In stark contrast to the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* decision, the *Zelman* opinion is closely divided and comparatively narrow, evidencing the justices' collective caution. By confining itself to the technical constitutional question presented, the Court steered clear of endorsing voucher programs as a matter of education policy. However, the opinion makes clear that carefully crafted voucher programs can successfully navigate through the often murky First Amendment waters. The decision will likely stimulate prompt legislative activity.

Second, the Court expressly noted the larger educational context that framed Cleveland's voucher program. Specifically, the Court remarked that the voucher program is nested within a broader array of educational options that include such public choice options as magnet and charter schools. It is difficult to over-emphasize the substantive weight of this point. In many ways, this issue—raised at oral argument by Justice O'Connor—pivots on a denominator question. The religious neutrality of a voucher program is not determined by

focusing on how many students take their vouchers to religious schools, as this represents only one portion of the denominator in question. Thus, the fact that 96 percent of students participating in the Cleveland voucher program attend religious schools, according to the Court, is of no constitutional concern.

Third, the Court places great weight on the nature and source of the



choice decision itself. The Court makes the point that whether vouchers end up at public, private, or religious schools flows not from any governmental action but "only as a result of numerous, private choices of individual parents of school-age children." Thus, the Court concludes that it is constitutionally "irrelevant" that the vast majority of voucher recipients selected religious schools. Such a result does not dislodge the Court's characterization of the voucher program as religiously neutral.

Fourth, through its decision in *Zelman*, the Court effectively shifts responsibility for the development of voucher programs from the judiciary into the collective hands of lawmakers, governors, and citizens. That is, we can now expect choice supporters and opponents to take their cases to lawmakers and governors—rather than judges—with greater alacrity. (Of course, no decision will preclude courts from further involvement with disputes over choice programs and establishment-clause issues.) This represents a significant shift in terms of how the debate surrounding school choice is cast. Policy rather than constitutional law will likely moor future school choice debates. We should expect a fuller, more robust discussion of the political and policy issues surrounding school choice, including vouchers, especially if, as is likely, policymakers continue to pursue school choice as a viable education reform option. Political leaders and policymakers can no longer point to constitutional uncertainty as an excuse to deflect attention from school choice policies. It should become equally clear how political leaders discharge their obligations and address the political and policy factors shaping school choice.

Michael Heise, Ph.D., is professor of law at Case Western Reserve University and served in the elder Bush's administration as deputy chief of staff to the U.S. Secretary of Education. This article was previously published in the *Education Gadfly* [www.edexcellence.net/gadfly/](http://www.edexcellence.net/gadfly/).

Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of *Michigan Education Report*. Tell us what you think: "Did the Supreme Court make the right decision in upholding school vouchers?" Send your comments to

Michigan Education Report • Letters to the Editor • c/o Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
140 West Main Street • P.O. Box 568 • Midland, Michigan 48640 • (989) 631-0900 • Fax (989) 631-0964  
[www.EducationReport.org](http://www.EducationReport.org) • [Letters@EducationReport.org](mailto:Letters@EducationReport.org)