

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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News and analysis for parents, educators and policymakers

Winter 2006

SHORT SUBJECTS

The number of Michigan schools failing to make "Adequate Yearly Progress" under the federal No Child Left Behind Act increased 25 percent, from 436 in 2005 to 544 in 2006. About one-third of all high schools in the state failed to attain AYP.

A private company from Texas helped Battle Creek schools save \$5 million over the past decade by installing computer software that manages energy use. A contract with the company cost less than \$450,000, while the savings has allowed the school to buy thousands of computers.

MEAP scores for the Michigan's class of 2006 were down in four of five categories compared to 2005: reading, math, science and writing. Only social studies increased, although at 37 percent proficient it had the lowest overall score.

A Catholic grade school is again the only Michigan school to be named a Blue Ribbon recipient under No Child Left Behind standards. St. Paul on the Lake in Grosse Pointe Farms is one of 250 winning schools this year. Royal Oak Shrine won in 2005 and Guardian Angels in Clawson won in 2003. No Michigan school made the list in 2004.

The city of Pontiac was cited by the National Alliance for Public Charter schools as being in the "top 10" nationally for charter school presence. Cities on the list have at least 13 percent of all public school students served by charters.

Philanthropic and education leaders in Flint are investigating how to develop a program similar to the "Kalamazoo Promise," in order to boost the number of area students who attend college.

Most Michigan high school graduates are not "college ready" according to performances on the ACT. Only 25 percent of test takers in the Class of 2006 scored high enough to be considered college ready, meaning they have a 75 percent chance or better of getting a "C" grade or higher in a college course.

SHORT SUBJECTS, Page 8



South Range Elementary School, near Houghton, is shown in this March 2006 photo after the Keweenaw Peninsula was hit with a storm that left nearly 50 inches of snow on the ground. Normal snowfall in the area for March is about 20 inches. Photo: Houghton Daily Mining Gazette.

WINTER WEATHER WONDERLAND

U.P. schools face weather challenges 6 months a year

Every day is a snow day during winter in the Upper Peninsula. It's just a matter of which ones are bad enough to cancel school.

"We get hit with lake effect snow from both sides," Dennis Harbour, superintendent of Copper Country Intermediate School District, told Michigan Education Report. "We don't get a lot of sleet and that sort of thing, but when we get a heavy snowfall, it just flat out comes down."

Copper Country ISD, which covers three counties and 13 school districts on the U.P.'s Keweenaw Peninsula, sees as much as 300 inches of snow a year.

"We have some long winters here," Harbour said. "Basically from late October

to late April, we're dealing with these issues. That's a good chunk of the school year."

Harbour said it's not uncommon to even have snow in May.

"April is a miserable month as it is, with rain and snow," he said. "But snow in May can get old in a hurry."

CANCELLATIONS

Copper Country ISD has a unique approach to canceling school, through an all-or-nothing policy, with Harbour making the final call after consulting with road commission officials from the three counties and a few local superintendents.

"It can lead to a lot of confusion when you've got one district open and the next one over is closed," Harbour said. "We've done it this way for the better part of 20 years and have virtually no complaints."

Harbour said people from the three county road commissions call him between 4:30 and 5 a.m. if there was snow the night before.

"They really do a great job," he said. "In
WINTER, Page 2

MICHIGAN LAGS BEHIND SOME STATES

Alternative teacher certification

Driving southbound on I-75 recently, Marvin Benedetti spoke excitedly about his new opportunity to change careers and become a teacher. The 50-year-old told Michigan Education Report, via his cell phone, about his 32-year career as a die designer at General Motors, his 12 years as an adjunct faculty member at Macomb County Community College, and his desire to become a high school math teacher.

Benedetti, however, won't be doing any teaching in Michigan. His southbound trek on I-75 was actually taking him back to Florida, where he is in the process of moving.

From the Big Three to Dow Chemical to Upjohn, not to mention researchers at colleges and universities statewide, Michigan is flush with experts in mathematics, the sciences and engineering, yet a person who holds a doctorate is not allowed to teach in a public school without going through the state's exacting certification steps.

The American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence is trying to change that.

"Our goal is to help transition people looking to make a career change into the classroom," said Andrew Campanella, senior director of teacher recruitment and communications for ABCTE. "We want to see a physician, for example, in the classroom, inspiring the next generation of doctors, or a novelist in an English class."

Benedetti, who took early retirement from GM, will work as a die designer at a small company in Florida while going through the ABCTE program.

"It was actually a school district in Florida that pointed me in this direction," Benedetti said. "It doesn't make a lot of sense that Michigan doesn't accept this type of thing. If I felt like in the future they would, I'd love to stay. Maybe Michigan will eventually turn it around."

ABCTE, founded in 2001, has developed a program it calls "Passport to Teaching" that is designed to help people get certified to teach in public schools within their area of expertise. The program takes between six and nine months, and is accepted by the state Departments of Education in Florida, Idaho, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Mississippi

CERTIFICATION, Page 5

K-Promise one year later Cities big and small hope to replicate it

The Philly Promise? The Denver Promise? The Flint Promise?

Cities of all sizes across the United States would like to replicate the Kalamazoo program that offers free college tuition to Kalamazoo Public Schools graduates who meet certain criteria.

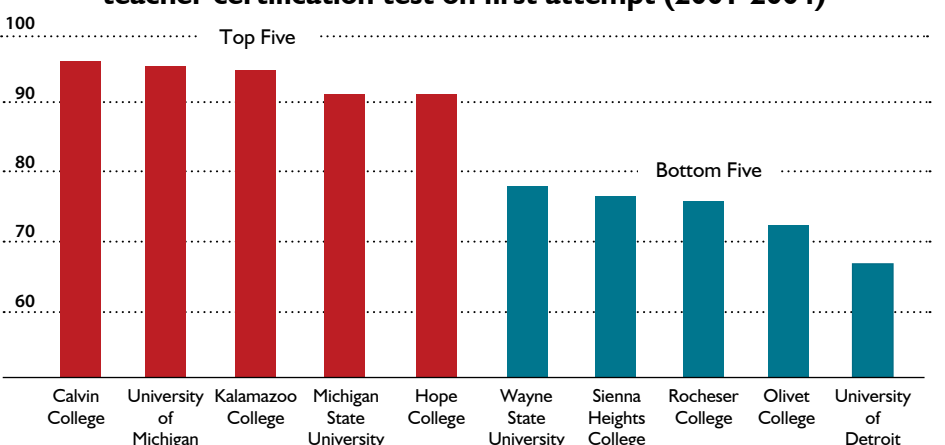
"We get contacted very frequently, probably once a day," Robert Jorth, administrator of The Kalamazoo Promise, told Michigan Education Report. "From all corners of the U.S."

Jorth said people from cities as large as Philadelphia, Denver, Minneapolis and Tacoma, Wash., have called his office seeking advice and information.

"Some times it's a private citizen, other times it's a person from a foundation, or a government official," Jorth said. "Some
K-PROMISE, Page 8

Education at a Glance

Percentage of students passing teacher certification test on first attempt (2001-2004)



Source: Michigan Department of Education; "Michigan Test for Teacher Certification Performance," May 30, 2006

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Winter

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most districts, it's up to the super and the principals to go out and drive the roads, but they take care of that."

Harbour said plow drivers report road conditions, as well as estimates on how soon roads can be cleared for bus traffic.

"We have a lot of days when a total cancellation isn't needed, but we'll have a late start," Harbour said. "Or, if it looks like we have a big storm coming, we'll have an early dismissal."

Jim Rayner, a third-year superintendent with Ironwood Area Schools on the far west side of the U.P., said he has canceled school a total of six times, four of them due to cold weather. He said he tries to make the call the night before, when possible.

"It's a lot easier on parents if they find out at 10 p.m. the night before," he said. "They can make whatever arrangements they need to, rather than trying to do it on a cell phone while driving to work in the morning."

Pat Covitz, principal at Dickinson Area Catholic School, said her school's practice has always been to close when Iron Mountain Public Schools close.

"They pretty much keep watch all night," Covitz said. "Some families might have children to attend both schools, so it's easier if we keep the same schedule."

VISIBILITY AND TEMPERATURE

Harbour said the amount of snow the Keweenaw Peninsula receives is not a major issue, because the counties have the equipment to deal with it.

"The biggest factor is the visibility," he said. "Sure the buses are easy to spot, and they all have strobe lights on top, but it's the kids at the bus stops that you have to worry about."

Blowing snow, high snow banks, drifting and rural roads all play a part in it.

"You can't expect kids to stand out there and take a chance of someone hitting them," Harbour said.

Although the normal temperature hovers between 0 and 20 degrees most of the winter, Harbour said wind chill factors can drop as low as 30 or 40 below. That type of extreme weather also dictates closing school. Other times, the temperature may not be low enough to cancel school, but it can be low enough to keep students inside, rather than letting them out for recess or lunch.

Rayner said he relies on his career as an Air Force pilot when it comes to deciding when to close schools.

"When I was with the Air National Guard in Battle Creek, we had a contract with our civilian maintenance people that if it got colder than minus 25 with the wind chill, we didn't fly," Rayner said. "And this was with adults who had federal-issue cold weather gear. I certainly can't expect kids to stand outside in the same weather, especially if they've lost a mitten or decide they don't want to wear their warm coat because it doesn't look cool."

Rayner said the risk of visibility also plays a part in his decisions.

"You've got frost on windshields, huge snow banks," he said. "By putting kids out on the roadside, there are just a whole lot of

bad things that can happen."

Some schools in the western part of the U.P. were closed on Friday, Oct. 13, as more than 10 inches of snow fell.

Covitz said Iron Mountain is located in what is often called the "banana belt" of the U.P. because it is not near the water and has relatively milder winters.

"That doesn't mean we never get hit with snow, but just not as much," she said.

Covitz did say, however, that Upper Peninsula schools close one day a year, almost without exception, regardless of the weather. The date is Nov. 15, which is the opening day of firearms deer hunting season.

"It's a holiday," Covitz laughed. "We have an all-female staff now, and we still close. People just expect it."

In her first year as principal, Covitz said she decided not to cancel classes, and several parents were upset.

"We have a male bus driver, and he told me he guarantees he was the only bus driver in the whole U.P. on the roads that day," she said.

MAINTENANCE

Along with a unique cancellation policy come other unique weather challenges. School buses in the U.P. must be stored in heated garages during the winter.

"They'd never last outside," Harbour said. "Those diesel engines would plug right up."

Because of what Harbour calls "extreme rural conditions" in many parts of the CCISD, bumpy roads can damage rear springs on the buses.

"Those things just take a real beating," he said. "But that's year-round."

Once all that snow has fallen, getting rid of it can pose a challenge, too.

"Because of the volume we get, at least once a month the schools have end loaders and trucks come in to cart it away," Harbour said. "It's almost as large a problem as when it falls."

Harbour said snow piles build up high enough that you cannot see in or out of parking lots, which also causes visibility problems for entering and exiting vehicles.

"You have to either go dump it in the lake or stockpile it in a field somewhere."

Although the Upper Peninsula faces weather challenges the rest of the state does not, it receives no special treatment under state law for class time requirements.

"We get our 30 hours of clock time, just like everyone else," Harbour said. "Any cancellations or delays count against it. After that, we make up the time at the end of the year."

Rayner said aside from storing the buses inside for the Ironwood district, they also buy buses without air brakes.

"They can get condensation in them, and if that freezes, it can be bad," he said. "You also have to be careful with the diesel, because if it gets too cold, that stuff can congeal, and if you have a bus that gets stuck 10 miles outside of town full of kids, with no heat, it can be trouble."

Rayner said even if his district were to have several cancellation days, it still wouldn't mean going to school much past June 1.

"Since they did away with the require-

ment for 180 days, the concept is to use your time wisely," he said. "We got rid of most of our half days, because they don't have a lot of instructional value, and we added 10 minutes

to each school day. The weather here on June 1 isn't that great anyway, so it's better to be in school then rather than taking a big risk just to have school in the winter." ♦

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Post-Labor Day school start Critics still unhappy with mandate

When Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed House Bill 4803 into law in late 2005, industry experts said shifting the start of the school year to after Labor Day would pump millions of needed dollars into Michigan's lagging tourism economy. Many school officials, however, decried the top-down regulation, which they said took decision-making power away from them.

Tourism, which is often referred to as one of Michigan's top three industries – along with automobiles and agriculture – generates about \$17.5 billion a year, according to the Michigan State University Tourism Resource Center. Don Holecek, who directs the center, told Michigan Education Report that the post-Labor Day start should increase tourism spending by about 5 percent over 2005, because two-thirds of Michigan's travel business comes from in-state residents.

"It will be a while before all the data is collected and thoroughly looked at," Holecek said. "But I'd be surprised if we didn't at least hit that 5 percent mark."

Evidence collected since then seems to support such predictions. Al Zehnder, owner of Zehnder's Bavarian Inn of Frankenmuth, said his business was up 12 percent in the last two weeks of August compared to the same time frame a year ago, Booth reported. Michigan's Adventure, an amusement and water park located in Muskegon, stayed open on weekdays during the week before Labor Day for the first time in a decade, while Great Wolf Lodge in Traverse City had "several hundred" more rooms booked over the last 10 days in August than a year ago, the newspaper reported.

MIRS, a Lansing-based political newsletter, reported that testimony given before the Senate Agriculture, Forestry and Tourism Committee showed the change made an impact. Steve Yencinch of the Michigan Hotel, Motel and Resort Association said 53 percent of the group's members that replied to a survey reported an increase in business during late August. Not all the tourism bump was directed toward the traditional "up north" area either, as Henry Ford Museum reported 26,000 more visitors in late August compared to a year ago, MIRS reported.

Yencinch said a plan by the state to spend \$15 million over two years to bolster tourism has so far returned \$3.43 in tax revenue for every \$1 spent.

Holecek said several factors still have to be considered, and they may or may not have an impact on future years.

"Not all schools were on the new system yet," he said. "Some still had previ-

ous contracts in place, so that will take a year or two."

Holecek also said job losses and high gas prices may have limited the amount of traveling by some people.

"It might take a while to change people's psychology," Holecek added. "To realize they can take trips later into the summer."

The change, however, still has its detractors, including those who say school calendars should be a locally decided issue.

"People in the community are just as smart as the people in Lansing, and we should let them make decisions," Madison Superintendent Jim Hartley told the Adrian Daily telegram.

School boards across the state were opposed to HB 4803, with professional groups such as the Michigan Association of School Boards and the Michigan Association of School Administrators taking official stands against the legislation.

Aside from a boost to the tourism industry, it was predicted that public schools could experience a trickle down effect, because a portion of the sales tax is used for the School Aid Fund, from which per-pupil expenditures are appropriated.

Bob Tebo, superintendent of the Britton-Macon school district, told the Daily Telegram "I hope we get tons," regarding the potential funding increase, but that did not offset his displeasure with the law.

"But as far as kids are concerned, and as far as what goes on in the classroom, it was wrong," he said. "Nobody can convince me that anything that happened about this law was done to benefit the students."

The state in 2005 moved the Michigan Education Assessment Program tests from winter to fall, in hopes that teachers could get results back faster and have time within the current school year to help students in problematic areas. Delaying school until after Labor Day, particularly in years when Labor Day may not fall until its latest possible date, Sept. 8, leaves just a few weeks of preparation before the October MEAP dates.

HB 4803 was not the first legislative foray into school calendars. In 1999, Public Act 141 set a three-year window, beginning with the 2000-2001 school year, wherein the Friday of Labor Day would be a school holiday. That was followed in 2003 with an adjustment of how much time students must spend in school, as the legislature got rid of the previous 180-day mandate and replaced that with a law that said school must meet for 1,098 hours in an academic year. Such a move allowed schools to tailor the length of their days, right down to actual classroom time. ♦

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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Correction

The story titled "Public and private schools share faculty for electives" on page 5 of the Fall 2006 Michigan Education Report should have said the Michigan Department of Education Web site gives an example of a public school providing a computer class for one hour a day for 90 days, or ((60 minutes/60 minutes per hour) x 90 days)/1,098 hours, which gives each private school student a "full-time equivalent" of 0.081.

Technical education programs

House Bills 6370 through 6384 would transfer oversight of several technical and career education programs to the Department of Education. All 15 passed 54-44 in the House on Sept. 7 and are before the Senate Education Committee. The bills cover things such as administration of work study programs, education grants, post secondary career education programs, K-12 vocational programs, adult education and community college governance of technical training. Most of the programs had been under the jurisdiction of the Department of Community Development.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6370

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6371

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6372

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www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6383

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6384

Move up kindergarten start

A pair of bills has been introduced in the Michigan House that would move up the cutoff date for students starting kindergarten by three months. Currently, a student must turn 5 years old by December 1 of the school year in which they enter kindergarten, but the new bills would move that up to September 1. House Bill 6446 would move that date up gradually,

one month at a time, over three years. House Bill 6448 allows school districts to then collect per-pupil funding for students who enroll in kindergarten. The bills were assigned to the House Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6446

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6448

Remedial education information

Senate Concurrent Resolution 55 asks Michigan's public colleges and universities to make available to each Michigan high school how many graduates of that high school are taking remedial math or English classes. It has been assigned to the Senate Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SCR-55

Food allergies

Senate Bill 1397 calls on school districts to adopt policies to limit the exposure of students with severe food allergies, as well as ensure timely response should such an exposure occur. The bill is before the Senate Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SB-1397

PPOs for schools

House Bill 6403 would allow school districts to seek Personal Protection Orders against people who have been accused, but not convicted, of sexual misconduct with a student. Such a PPO would prohibit the person from coming on or near school property, bus stops, or the route the particular student takes to school. House Bill 6406, meanwhile, would give police the right to arrest a person found in violation of such a Personal Protection Order, without having to obtain a warrant

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

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first. The House Judiciary Committee is considering the bills.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6403

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6406

Prop A overhaul

House Bill 6419 would give the ability to "hold harmless" school districts – those where the per-pupil funding was more than \$6,500 when Proposal A was passed in 1994 – to levy additional taxes that increase the foundation level to the rate of inflation. Such tax levies are currently illegal under Prop A. The bill is before the House Appropriations Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6419

New vaccine mandated

A pair of bills would require girls in Michigan entering sixth grade to receive an immunization against human papillomavirus, which researchers say has a connection to cervical cancer. Senate Bills 1416 and 1417 would apply to students in both public and independent schools. Parents could sign a waiver stating they had read information about the vaccine and elected not to allow their child to receive it. The bills passed 36-1 in the Senate and were referred to the House Health Policy Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SB-1416

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SB-1417

School bus stops

House Bills 6450 and 6451 would make changes to the law that details school bus stop procedures. HB 6450 would require school buses drivers to activate flashing red lights 400 feet before stopping to pick up or drop off students, instead

of the current requirement of 200 feet. HB 6451 would require drivers to stop immediately upon seeing a school bus's flashing red lights activate, rather than the current requirement of stopping 20 feet away from the bus. The bill also removes a requirement that the lights be red. Both bills were assigned to the House Transportation Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6450

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6451

Graduation rates

Senate Bill 1413 would require intermediate school districts to audit graduation and drop out rates reported by school districts. The bill is assigned to the Senate Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SB-1413

Back-to-school tax holiday

House Bill 6531 would make back-to-school items exempt from Michigan's 6 percent sales tax. The "sales tax holiday" would run from Aug. 15 to Sept. 15 each year, and apply to items such as school supplies, clothing and shoes, with a \$100 cap per each item. The bill was referred to the House Tax Policy Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6531

Interest-free college loans

Students who graduate from a Michigan public college or university with a bachelor's degree in one of several specified technology programs would receive a grant to pay the interest portion of outstanding student loans, if House Bill 6538 were to pass. The bill, which establishes a fund for the program but does not address where the money would come from, is before the House Higher Education Committee. ♦

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-6538

Detroit-area Catholic schools look to future

"We're a system of schools, not a school system"

The past, present and future of Catholic schools in southeast Michigan paint three very distinct pictures, as struggling families and shrinking enrollment lead to more school closures and more change.

"The economic status of Michigan right now is not good," Sister Mary Gehringer, O.S.M., told Michigan Education Report. "Parents have lost their jobs, or had to move away to find work, and so they can't afford to keep their kids in Catholic school."

Gehringer, superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Detroit, said this trend that began in urban areas has now spread to parts of suburban metro-Detroit.

"The auto industry and many of its related businesses are having a rough time," she said. "Even if people don't move away, they may stay in the parish but opt out of paying for tuition."

The average tuition for an elementary school in the archdiocese last year was about \$2,400, according to Gehringer, while the average high school tuition was almost \$5,600. The state spends a minimum of \$7,025 per student in public schools.

"Our tuition levels are set on a local basis," Gehringer said. "They are set by each parish, based on what they think is needed to run the school, and what is appropriate for the area."

Gehringer said the schools in the archdiocese are considered a "system of schools, not a school system," and therefore give parishes a great deal of leeway in running their respective schools.

"There is a lot of local control, so to speak," Gehringer said, referring to a term frequently used in discussions of public schools. "We don't get involved in personnel or the hiring and firing, although we will

assist in the interview process for administrator roles."

Some parishes have established endowments or scholarship funds, which can help reduce the tuition burden for families on a needs-based formula, while other parishes have chosen to be flexible on how the tuition is paid off, be it in full, via installments or even through service hours.

THE NUMBERS

The archdiocese currently has 115 schools, 22 of which are high schools. Two years ago, it closed 17 schools, Gehringer said, most of them in the city of Detroit. Since 2001, the archdiocese has seen about an 8 percent drop in enrollment, from almost 49,000 down to just under 38,400.

"That's really the case all across the country," Gehringer said. "It's not specific to Michigan."

Sister Dale McDonald, P.B.V.M., director of public policy for the National Catholic Education Association, said Detroit mirrors what is happening in many urban cities.

"This is being repeated in places like Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Camden," McDonald told Michigan Education Report. "It is a trend that has developed and began to accelerate over the last five years. We've seen a 13 percent drop in the number of schools and a 20 percent decrease in elementary-age students."

According to the Council for American Private Education, a report from the federal government released last March shows independent schools nationwide saw enrollment drop about 4 percent, or 220,000 students, between 2001 and 2003, ending a 10-year span of growth. The number of independent

schools dropped 3 percent in that same two-year span, from 29,273 to 28,384.

EFFECT OF CHARTERS

As enrollment in Catholic schools has declined, both in the Detroit area and across Michigan, enrollment in charter public schools has seen a surge in enrollment. According to the Michigan Association of Public School Academies, charters experienced a 13 percent increase in students last year statewide, to more than 92,000, while the 41 charters in Detroit grew 23 percent, to more than 23,700 students. It is hard to show any direct correlation between the two, but Gehringer thinks there may be anecdotal evidence.

"There have been parishes that closed their schools, and then to make up for some lost revenue, they rent or lease that space out to a charter school," she said. "Families in the area who might not even be Catholic, don't know the difference, all they know is that it is free (charter schools are tax funded and cannot charge tuition). They see the cross on the building, the kids in uniforms, and they sign up."

THE FUTURE

Gehringer best describes the future of Catholic schools by addressing the past.

"It's not like when I was growing up," she said. "Parents just had it in mind that they were going to make that sacrifice. Now, there are a lot of other options, not to mention that families are smaller."

The archdiocese is going through a process of re-evaluating how it will best meet the education needs of parishioners and other parents with what appear to be fewer resources.

"We intend to maintain offering a Catholic education in all areas of the archdiocese," Gehringer said. "It may not be at every parish, but it will be in every area."

Part of that decision will be including the Catholic mission of service, particularly in low-income areas.

"We have some pockets in Detroit, where there are almost no Catholics in our schools," Gehringer said. "If the Gospel tells us to reach out to the poor, it cannot be only the Catholic poor. If they are seeking a good education for their children, we have to ask ourselves 'how can we provide it?'"

At this point, there are plans to build one new Catholic high school in northern Macomb County, and reopen one previously closed in Detroit. The Macomb County Regional Catholic High School group, a coalition made up of people from seven area parishes, is in the process of raising \$30 million. It hopes to open the Austin Academy, with room for about 800 boys and girls, in the fall of 2008.

"This has been in the works for a number of years," according to Leonard Brillati, the group's president. "About 25 percent of the support comes from parents of school-aged children, but many of us are grandparents. We have a wide variety of age groups who all want to support Catholic education in our area."

Of the seven supporting parishes, three have elementary schools. High school students in the area attend various public schools, as well as other Catholic high schools located in St. Clair, Oakland and Wayne counties.

The group obtained land for the school from the archdiocese, but must raise the money on their own.

"They are conducting an aggressive campaign, but it will take a while because they're starting from scratch," Gehringer said. "The archdiocese supports them, but we will not build it for them."

McDonald said other parts of the country, especially in the Midwest and out east, face similar situations as people move from cities to suburbs.

"We have kids where there are no buildings and buildings where there are no kids," McDonald said. "And many of the buildings we have are quite old. It's expensive to heat them, and that adds to the cost for families."

Internationally known public school superintendent visits Michigan

“We decided we’d just out-compete them”

While parents, administrators, teachers and legislators talk about school reform, one man is carrying the message throughout North America on just how to do it.

Angus McBeath, retired superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools in Alberta, Canada, recently met with school officials, policymakers and members of the media across Michigan to discuss the 30-year track record of school reform in his district.

“Edmonton is not unique because we were not any more inclined to reform,” McBeath (pronounced “McBeth”) told an Issues & Ideas forum in Lansing sponsored by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. “At any point, if you don’t get better, that would seem to satisfy everyone in the system.”

During McBeath’s trip to Michigan, he also spoke with several public school superintendents in Grand Rapids, and later appeared as a guest on the Frank Beckmann show on WJR 760AM.

McBeath said his predecessor was the first to embrace change.

“He realized that no matter what, as long as the state gave us more money, we were going to spend it all,” he said. “It didn’t matter if the parents were happy or unhappy.”

In the province of Alberta, much like Michigan, tax dollars for school funding

“But is a ZIP code more or less thoughtful than a parent who visits six high schools before deciding which one to send their child to?”

are given out on a per-pupil basis, and the money follows the student. There are, however, major differences between other parts of the school systems in Alberta and Michigan. Charter schools in Alberta are funded at 100 percent of what conventional public schools receive, while private schools get two-thirds the amount per pupil that public schools get. In Edmonton, there also are two separate, distinct public school systems that cover the same territory.

Throw in all of Edmonton’s suburbs and their school districts, which also are available to EPS students, and the number of choices parents have for their children’s education is wide and deep. McBeath said 57 percent of students in the district do not go to the school to which they normally would be assigned. Because of that choice, it is interesting to note that from a metropolitan area of 1.1 million people, the Edmonton district has just 81,000 students. In comparison, the city of Detroit has roughly 900,000 people, but Detroit Public Schools has 129,000 students.

“With all that choice, you have to be so much more responsive to your customers,” McBeath said.

Because of the funding mechanisms for charter and private schools in Alberta, all schools compete for students.

“Our goal is to not have any charter or private schools left,” McBeath said. “The legislature decided to fund them, we didn’t. There was no vote of the people on that. So we decided we’d just out-compete them.”

McBeath makes it clear that he has nothing against charter or private school education, but in his quest to make EPS the best it can be, he thought it necessary to lure students away from those schools. Because there are no anti-parochial school laws in Alberta, most of the charter and private schools in Edmonton have actually joined the Edmonton Public School system while being allowed to maintain their faith-based instruction.

“The union was horrified at first, saying we wanted to connect church and state,” McBeath recalls. “Then I explained to them that bringing these schools in would swell



Former Edmonton schools Superintendent Angus McBeath addresses legislators and educators at an Issues & Ideas forum.

their ranks by hundreds. We did the first one and the world didn’t end.”

ZIP CODES VS PARENTS

Letting parents pick what school to send their children to played an integral role in Edmonton’s reform, although not without much opposition.

“The central office was very worried,” he said. “Everyone basically took the approach that parents were too stupid to choose schools for their children. Resistance is natural. But is a ZIP code more or less thoughtful than a parent who visits six high schools before deciding which one to send their child to?”

McBeath said one of the main complaints was that parents would not choose the bad schools, which drew several chuckles from his audience.

“People were actually worried about how to keep bad schools open,” he said. “I told them there were two options. Make it better or shut it down.”

As late as 2005 Edmonton closed four schools, including one that had dropped to 300 students.

“I told everyone that the school board was not closing this school,” McBeath recalls. “The parents who are in charge are. There’s no magic to keeping a school open that’s doing a good job.”

McBeath says every student starts out every school year with a “passport,” that allows them unfettered choice of Edmonton Public Schools. The district even gives students subsidized bus passes to help them facilitate their choice.

PROGRAMS

Some 40 percent of EPS students attend a school that offers one of 35 specialty programs, ranging from Mandarin language and culture to performing arts to science to hockey, as well as schools that have pockets within them for Christian, Jewish and Arabic studies.

“Whatever parents want, we offer,” McBeath said. “If we don’t offer it, they’ll call a charter.”

To help ensure that schools in low-income areas of the district are not completely ignored – about one-fourth of the school population is below the national poverty line – the district places the most sought after programs in them.

“Our most popular performing arts program is in a school in the city center, next to a row of pawn shops,” McBeath said. “Kids from middle and upper income families are riding through different parts of town, meeting different people, because they want to. If you have to make a law to induce that, it’s not as compelling.”

THE 92 PERCENT SOLUTION

In 1976, on the verge of Edmonton’s reform, the district decided to give 80 cents of every dollar it received in taxes directly to the schools, based on how many students each building enrolled. Building principals became responsible for how that money was spent, and therefore no longer had the excuse that they were “just following orders.”

That level of authority allows them to decide what textbooks to buy, how to deliver the best education for their building, and even how to control energy costs. In 1995, the amount going to the schools was increased to 92 cents of every dollar.

“It caused some distress among the central administration,” McBeath said. “They all went through every one of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’s five stages of grieving. They realized ‘my god, no one would ever actually buy our services.’”

Critics claimed the money would not be spent properly, or that some areas would get more attention while others were ignored. McBeath said that is where central administration does still play a role, including setting standards and policies.

Maintenance, for example, is an area where principals have a great deal of latitude.

Edmonton Public Schools has drawn worldwide attention for its innovative reforms, and was called one of the most decentralized and effectively managed school systems in North America by William Ouchi, a management professor at UCLA.

“If a building needs painted, they can either use our internal tradesman, or they can put it out for tender (bid) and see if a private company can do it for less,” McBeath said.

Technology spending went up three times what had been budgeted as individual buildings were able to appropriate money for what they felt was most needed, while other spending categories decreased.

“The number of school social workers fell to six, after they had just been begging us for 500 of them,” McBeath said. “People realized you can get that service from the state, and maybe that isn’t necessarily the role of schools.”

Edmonton Public Schools has drawn worldwide attention for its innovative reforms, and was called one of the most decentralized and effectively managed school systems in North America by William Ouchi, a management professor at UCLA.

McBeath, who now serves as a Fellow in Public Education Reform for the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies in Canada, has worked with school districts across the United States and Canada, including New York City, Scottsdale, Ariz., and Colorado Springs, Colo.

ROOM TO IMPROVE

McBeath makes it clear that parental choice is not an avenue to better school performance.

“Choice alone is not enough,” he said. “It should not dictate the quality of education. You cannot have islands of quality.”

Even after many of the changes had been implemented, Edmonton Public Schools found it was only graduating 63 percent of its students.

“We published that everywhere,” McBeath recalls. “We posted it in our elevators, we put it on our answering machines. Even today, if you call and get put on hold, you’ll hear how we’re doing.”

McBeath said this, too, horrified people, with many saying that publicizing it would drive parents away.

“We deserved to lose kids,” he said. “But parents are very forgiving. ‘If you can show progress and they know you’ve got the best interests of the students in mind, they’ll stay with you.’”

McBeath said research proves that anyone who does not graduate from high school is “doomed,” including a life of lower pay, fewer opportunities, substandard housing and even worse health.

“And that’s in a country with free health care,” he jokes.

TEACHERS INTEGRAL TO SUCCESS

Along with getting money and the authority to spend it, buildings must now account for results. Principals are required to spend 50 percent of their time in classrooms.

“We can’t rely on teachers colleges to teach teachers how to teach,” McBeath said. “It is a relentless, exhausting life. We shouldn’t just put them in a classroom and leave them there for 30 years.”

McBeath, who began his career as a teacher on Prince Edward Island, said he thinks continuous, useful professional development is a must for a district that respects its teachers.

“The guy fixing my car shouldn’t have more training than the person teaching my son,” McBeath said.

McBeath said Edmonton schools even paid for billboard advertising to show support and respect for its teachers. Principals now go through a two-year training program before even getting the job, learning how to mentor, coach and observe teachers, as well as providing professional development.

Today, 90 percent of elementary students in EPS can read and write at grade level. McBeath said that’s better, and some people would stop there, but it’s not enough. He asks why 100 percent shouldn’t be the goal, and likens it to not flying on an airline that doesn’t strive for 100 percent of safe landings.

“Which children in Michigan would we not want to be successful?” he said. “Maybe telling them at 6 years old that they won’t graduate from high school and that they’ll lead a life of poverty is cruel and inhumane, but it’s cruel and inhumane to wait until they’re 20 to tell them, too.” ♦



More money for higher ed doesn't ensure prosperity

Economist: Weak correlation

As Michigan attempts to rebound from what some observers have called a "one-state recession," many have called for more government spending at colleges and universities, in hopes that more college graduates will equal higher personal incomes. The evidence, however, does not support this theory, according to one expert.

Richard Vedder, distinguished professor of economics at Ohio University, spoke at an Issues and Ideas forum hosted by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, explaining that there is a weak correlation, at best, between spending more tax dollars on higher education and any increase in a state's economic growth.

Vedder has extensively studied the relationship between economic growth and state appropriations to universities. In a series of empirical analyses, he found that there was, if any, a *negative* relationship between a state's spending on higher education and the growth of its personal income.

In comparing similar states, Vedder stated that even though Michigan's higher education appropriations have historically been higher than those of its neighbors, Illinois and Ohio, Michigan devoted a much higher portion of its personal income to higher education than the other two, and yet it grew the least out of the three states. The same holds true for other states: North Dakota and South Dakota, New Hampshire and Vermont, Kentucky and Tennessee.

"In every case, the state with the smaller higher education commitment had higher rates of economic growth," Vedder observed.

Vedder explained a few reasons why spending more money on higher education will not lead to greater economic growth. The first is that spending more money on higher education does not mean that more students graduate from college. In his analysis of the relationship between state higher education and economic growth, he did find that a 20 percent increase in state appropriations leads to a 1 percent increase in students attending college, a large cost for a small gain.

"What is important is not getting the kids into college so much as getting them out, making them graduates," Vedder said.

Vedder found that there was no relationship between state spending on higher education and the percent of the state population with a college degree.

Second, he argued that getting students to college does not necessarily make them better workers.

"In fact, much of the higher earnings of college grads come not from what they learn in college, but from positive traits they had before entering," he said. "Employers are largely prohibited by law to test applicants in various ways, so a college degree is a legal way for employers to get information to screen out unproductive workers from productive workers."

Because of this, Vedder argues that spending money on higher education would be an ineffective way to grow the economy. While there is not much evidence to suggest that state appropriations lead to higher growth, there is a huge body of evidence to suggest that lowering personal income taxes does, Vedder observed. If policymakers were deciding between the two methods of growing the economy, the evidence falls in favor of the tried and true. ♦

Resolved: Debate Workshops a success

Hundreds of Michigan high school students attend

More than 470 Michigan high school debate students and coaches got a jump start on their season by attending one of four Debate Workshops hosted by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

The workshops, held Sept. 25-28 in Livonia, Jackson, Grand Rapids and Traverse City, gave students a chance to hear national speakers offer points both for and against this year's topic, as well as learn round-winning strategies.

Debate students across the country will be focusing on the same question throughout their forensic competitions, that being "Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish a policy substantially increasing the number of persons serving in one or more of the following national service programs: AmeriCorps, Citizen Corps, Senior Corps, Peace Corps, Learn and Serve America, Armed Services."

The workshops featured three speakers – Richard Edwards, Mike Winther and Greg Rehmke – all of whom returned to Michigan after participating in the 2005 workshops. Edwards, a professor of communication studies at Baylor University, has been the author of the "topic introduction" feature in the Forensic Quarterly since 1972. Winther, a former high school and college debater, is a frequent lecturer at debate camps and workshops around the country, and coaches a California debate club that is consistently ranked in the top 10 nationally. Rehmke, program director for Economic Thinking, has published resource books, study guides and newsletters focused on the economic aspects of the past 20 high school debate topics.

High schools participating this year came from across the education spectrum, including independent, conventional and charter public schools from urban and rural settings. They were: North Branch, Saginaw Heritage, Arts Academy in the Woods, Thurston, Hamilton, Michigan Islamic Academy, Bishop Foley, Stevenson, Dearborn, Livonia



Mackinac Center Debate Workshop speaker Mike Winther talks with students in Traverse City.

Churchill, New Covenant Christian, Madison, Northville, Lenawee Christian, Hudson, Adrian, Clinton, Greenville, Holt, Ionia, Kenowa Hills, Gateway, East Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Catholic Central, Forest Hills Central, Northview, Traverse City Central, Traverse City West, Petoskey and McBain.

Now in its 19th year, the Debate Workshop series is the Mackinac Center's longest running program. More than 8,000 students have benefited from well-known speakers, receiving information and details about research, preparation and presentation.

Blake Woodward, a student at Hudson High School, put it this way: "The Debate Workshop was an informative wonderland."

For the second consecutive year, workshop attendees had a chance to win one of four \$1,000 college scholarships. Students wishing to participate could submit an essay of 600 to 725 words on a subject of their choice. Styled after editorials found in newspapers, students were asked to

write in both a persuasive and informational manner.

Many schools participate in the workshops on an annual basis.

"If I wasn't a senior in high school, I definitely would like to attend again," said Kaylee Sorenson of Forest Hills Central High School.

Teachers also expressed appreciation for the workshops

"As a first year debate coach, this workshop was extremely beneficial to me and I know my novices are walking away with so much that will assist them as they begin their debate career," said Cheryl Pfister of East Grand Rapids High School.

Teachers and students can access more debate help any time during the year by visiting www.mackinac.org/debate and clicking on "Ask the Debate Coach." This interactive feature offers answers to debate questions within 48 hours. To learn more about the 2007 Debate Workshops, please contact Kendra Shrode at (989) 631-0900. ♦

Alternative Certification

continued from Page 1

and Utah, as well as the charter schools in Texas and Washington, D.C.

Once completed, the teachers also are automatically registered as "highly qualified" under the federal No Child Left Behind Act regulations, which require teachers to have a degree in, and exhibit content knowledge of, the core classes they teach.

Another Michigan resident, Sally Hoyt, also is looking at teaching in Florida after completing the ABCTE testing.

"I was down there visiting my sister, who is a teacher, and attended a meeting about it," Hoyt said. "It's perfect for someone like me, who is looking for a mid-life career change."

For Hoyt, it will actually be a return to teaching. As an art education major, Hoyt was certified to teach kindergarten through high school, but was not able to find a teaching job in the late 1970s, and ended up in the business world.

"What's wrong with people who have solid work experience in business wanting to become teachers?" Hoyt asked rhetorically. "Too many teachers start right out of college, get good benefits and then stay and stay, and the kids are the victims. They need fresh faces in there."

Not everyone agrees. Margaret Trimer-Hartley, communications director for the Michigan Education Association school employees union, does not think corporate experience makes for good teachers.

"All that proves is they can get up every day and show up for work on time," Trimer-Hartley told Michigan Education Report.

Trimer-Hartley did not return further phone calls to Michigan Education Report seeking comment on the process of alternative teacher certification.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, about one-third of public school teachers did not major or minor in the core subject(s) they teach. Sam Peavey, professor emeritus of the School of Education at the University of Illinois, testified before a subcommittee of the Iowa Legislature in 1988 that in 50 years of research, he could not find a significant correlation between teacher certification and student achievement.

Campanella says there are about 2,200 people currently enrolled in the program, and more than 100 already teaching in classrooms. Of those hired, a recent survey found 95 percent of the principals who hired ABCTE teachers found them as effective or more effective than teachers who come from a conventional undergraduate program. The average age of an ABCTE client is 40, and 40 percent of them hold advanced degrees. The program focuses on biology, chemistry, math, language arts, physics and special education.

People who sign up for ABCTE are paired with classroom teacher who acts as the person's adviser. Candidates take a series of tests to determine their knowledge of the subject matter in the area they hope to become certified, as well as tests to determine their "professional teaching knowledge." Professional teaching knowledge, Campanella says, covers everything from classroom management to developing lesson plans to learning how to deal with parents.

"It's essentially like the methods courses taught in colleges of education to undergrads," he said. "There's a self assessment to determine the person's level of knowledge, and then they work with the adviser to develop a study plan to learn what they need to learn."

Campanella said the program allows people to work at their own pace, and is tailored to mid-career changes.

"We realize people need to continue working and earning a paycheck," he said.

"But that shouldn't keep good people out of the classroom."

Depending on the state regulations, an ABCTE graduate receives a temporary teaching permit upon getting hired, then follows whatever probationary or beginning steps state law requires in order to obtain a full professional teaching certificate.

"All that proves is they (people with corporate experience) can get up every day and show up for work on time." —Margaret Trimer-Hartley, MEA spokeswoman

ABCTE's program, which costs \$560, is heavily focused on research-based techniques, which Campanella said makes for a strong background no matter the subject or person.

"There are mountains of evidence supporting this method," he said. "It's not dependent on recent fads or what one professor happens to think."

The group is now embarking on a program called Project 5,000, which is focused on recruiting 5,000 new math and science teachers by 2009, including a heavy emphasis on multi-cultural candidates.

"Something like this could be extremely beneficial in a state like Michigan, where you've recently increased the high school graduation requirements," Campanella said. "States that require tougher math and science classes have to make sure they have the teachers to fill those classrooms." ♦

For a chance to win an iPod and comment on this story, please go to www.educationreport.org/8017

SCHOOL FOCUS

Black River Public School

One of the Nation's Best

High school ranked
in top 100

HOLLAND – In just 10 short years, Black River Public School has climbed into the upper ranks of the nation's high schools based on student achievement. Its challenge now is to stay there.

"We're always looking at how to stay ahead of the curve," Greg Dykhouse, BRPS's director of academics, told Michigan Education Report. "We also want to be able to bring more to the students."

For example, Dykhouse said it was satisfying to see the state earlier this year institute high school graduation requirements.

"We started off with that kind of rigorous expectation," he said.

A May 2006 Newsweek article listed Black River at No. 55 among the nation's top 100 high schools, including No. 2 in Michigan. The top-ranked school in Michigan (and ninth overall) was the International Academy of Bloomfield Hills, a public high school run by a consortium of businesses and Oakland County school districts. The rankings are determined by dividing the number of students who take Advanced Placement exams by the number of graduating seniors.

"When we were organized in 1996, we said we wanted to help prepare students for college and for life," Head of School Dave Angerer said. "It was a natural choice to offer AP courses."

Students can receive college credit

based on how well they perform on AP exams.

"We judge the success of our mission based on how many seniors apply and are accepted into college," Angerer said. "We've done well by that. About 90 percent go on to higher education."

The 32 seniors who made up Black River's class of 2005, for example, earned more than \$850,000 combined in college scholarship money. Some 73 percent of them scored a 3, 4 or 5 on at least one AP exam, and they outscored the national average on both the ACT and SAT.

Angerer said Black River has produced two AP National Scholars, as well as several Scholars with Distinction and Scholars with Honor.

"The state has done a much better job in the last four or five years recognizing students who do well on AP exams," Angerer added. "They have a luncheon for them in Lansing and give them a 'Rising Star' award."

Dykhouse said Black River offers 18 different AP courses, with 12 to 14 taught in a given semester.

"We rotate them so that students have an opportunity to take as many as they want," he said. "For example, we have one teacher who does both English Language and English Literature, and those are rotated every other semester."

Dykhouse said it is not inexpensive to purchase the national AP curriculum, but it's something the school is committed to.

"It's not cheap, especially for a small school like us," Dykhouse said. "But these

students who are getting 4s and 5s on the exams, they are among the best in the world. They are preparing to be global leaders."

Angerer said the success at the high school level has spread to the middle and elementary school levels at Black River.

"Advanced Placement is really the capstone of our curriculum," Angerer said. "It bleeds down through the lower grades and is a focus of academic rigor."

Chartered by Grand Valley State University in 1996, Black River has grown into a three-building campus in Holland, located on property donated by the BASF Corporation. It has grown to 710 students in K-12, with a waiting list of about 150. Admission to Black River, as with all charter public schools, is free and open to everyone.

"A May 2006 Newsweek article listed Black River at No. 55 among the nation's top 100 high schools, including No. 2 in Michigan."

"It's important to note that our growth has occurred at a time when enrollment in our county has been relatively flat," Angerer said. "That's pretty significant."

Angerer said he's noticed a change in some of the conventional public schools in the area, which he thinks has been positive.

"Things are a little different since we came on the scene," he said. "More schools are adding AP classes, which they didn't

used to have. I think the Holland area is a microcosm of the benefits of school choice."

Black River so far has raised about \$1.3 million in a \$3 million capital campaign that will add a commons area, music rooms and a gymnasium to its grounds. Unlike conventional public school districts, charter schools cannot levy additional property taxes for capital projects.

"We tend to operate like a small university, in that we have a focus on development and we work with business leaders and parents who support our facility needs."

Aside from its performance and ranking on the list, Black River has another unique feature that sets it apart from many public schools in Michigan. The traditional marking period ends in early May, and that is followed by a four-week project term, during which students can study elective classes in-depth, both through research and hands-on learning.

"Last year, we had a group of seventh graders who studied Beaver Island," Angerer said. "They spent time learning about it, then they went there and camped, did some activities, then they came back and wrote it all up and presented it to everyone."

At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, a different group of students will venture a little farther away from home as part of the project term – Australia.

"They've been planning this for a long time," Angerer said. "They've been studying everything there is to know about the place." ♦



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BEYOND BROOMS, BURGERS AND BUSES



Companies Handle Competitive Contracts Statewide

The changing face of competitive contracting for Michigan's public schools has moved well beyond the tried-and-true methods of custodians, food service and transportation. It now encompasses administrators, coaches, paraprofessionals and substitute teachers.

According to Michigan law, a school district only has to directly employ two positions: superintendent and classroom teacher. Everything else is negotiable.

"We live in a competitive society," says Bernie Pelc, a former superintendent and founder of Professional Contract Management Inc. "People are basically free agents, and they can work for whatever district they want. People want to work for the best, a place that gives them the chance to be creative."

Pelc founded PCMI in 1995 after retiring from education. He realized that many former superintendents and other school administrators, who had started their careers right out of college at age 22, were retiring in their early 50s with 30 years in and a pension to collect.

"A lot of them were retiring and moving out of state, because they were still young," he said. "They were taking a lot of knowledge, history and talent with them."

This method can benefit both sides of the equation — schools and people — because neither is beholden to third-parties or outside entities. Employees can collect their pension and retiree health insurance, while continuing to work in a field they enjoy and get paid for it. The district gets to tap into a wealth of knowledge and work with the person they feel is best qualified for the job, rather than having to employ someone who is protected by collective bargaining. The two parties negotiate a salary based on what the market will allow, and both sides benefit.

Pelc works with individuals and school districts to match them up, but has expanded over the years to much more than just administrators.

"Superintendents and principals may be the biggest dollar in terms of savings, because they tend to get higher salaries," he said. "But there are so many areas that districts have."

Pelc said his firm handled contracts for about 800 workers during the 2005-2006 school year, but only 98 of them were administrators.

"Aside from supers and teachers, the law classifies everyone else as supplemental and complementary," Pelc said. "There are janitors and cooks and bus drivers, as well as substitute teachers, clerks, even athletic coaches."

A district can expect to save about 23 percent if they choose to sign a contract with an administrator, Pelc said. That's because since an administrator is paid at a higher salary, the benefit contributions are at a higher the percentage. If the person is not a direct employee of the district, it avoids having to pay those costs. The Michigan School Employee Retirement System is a defined benefit program, whereby schools pay a percentage of each employee's salary (more than 17 percent currently) into the system, and the system is then required to pay each retiree a set amount. That differs from 401(k)-type retirement plans that most workers are familiar with, which allows the employee the freedom to decide how much money to set aside, often with some form of match by employers.

Savings for substitute teachers and

coaches range from 7 to 11 percent, while savings on secretaries is just over 12 percent, Pelc said. Although each person signs an individual contract with the school district, and the district is not liable for benefits, PCMI makes available a wide range of those same benefits for workers to purchase, such as health, dental and vision insurance and a 401(k).

"Each person is looking for something different," Pelc said. "Every contract has its own little twist to make it personalized."

Two other companies, Workforce Strategies Inc. and Professional Educational Services Group, have found niches with substitute teachers, handling everything from recruiting to training to coaching to payroll. WSI's Education Staffing Division, headquartered in Kalamazoo, has contracts with 55 school districts and covers more than 2,600 subs.

"Some places just do payroll, but we've formed our nucleus around an entire substitute teacher management program," said Dave Bergland, president of the WSI Education Staffing Division. "We handle everything the districts used to do, at a savings for them."

Clark Galloway, vice president of operations of Caledonia-based PESG, said his firm handles about 3,500 substitutes in 65 districts.

Contracting services for substitute teachers can save school districts anywhere from 7 to 12 percent, according to the two companies, which can then be put back into classrooms in the form of teacher salaries and equipment.

"We look at the skill set of substitutes and then go beyond that," Bergland said. "We detail who is available and when, who wants to work in certain districts, certain schools, even certain classrooms. If we have 10 substitutes with the same skills set, we'll find the one who really wants to be in that classroom."

Galloway said the system makes life easier for substitute teachers, especially those who work in large counties such as Kent or Ottawa that have multiple school districts.

"We reduce 20 stops down to one," he said. "The applications, the W2 forms, the payroll checks, it all comes from one place."

Bergland said WSI made 58,000 substitute teacher placements in Michigan last year, with a 99 percent success rate.

"That's a lot better than a principal or assistant principal having to disrupt their day to go fill in," he said.

Both WSI and PESG also offer an a la carte selection of benefits, should a substitute teacher want to take advantage of it.

"Sometimes people will complain that by contracting with a private company, the subs are losing the benefits they had with the school," Galloway said. "That's not something schools offer to substitute teachers in the first place, so they're actually gaining something with us."

This school year, Pelc estimates he'll deal with about 1,500 people, well over 100 Michigan school districts, and a \$9 million payroll.

Because the firm deals with districts across the state, Pelc said he takes an approach that "a job pays what a job pays," meaning he lets the local market determine what a person will be paid.

"The school saves money based on the costs, not the salary," he said. "There's no reason to try and make salaries uniform all over the state. No one wants to hurt the

employees."

When it comes to groups of employees, Pelc said he has no desire to take over entire bargaining units.

"Usually we set it up so that we only handle new employees," he said. "The savings to the district is so much, that they then offer a financial incentive for current employees to join us. They often split the savings with employees. About 80 percent of the people join PCMI."

When it comes to something like substitute teachers, PCMI usually adopts whatever system a district already has in place.

"Some have automated calling, others have their own person," he said. "The districts continue to handle the intake and selection of subs. I want them to pick qualified people they feel comfortable with. But we can handle the payroll, the scheduling, things like that."

Pelc said not all workers he deals with are employees. He keeps a database of people and districts across the state, in order to match the two sides with the best possible fit.

"Sometimes a person will call me and say they want to move to a different part of the state, and do we have anything available," Pelc said. "There is no cookie cutter formula. It's what fits best."

Although many union contracts stipulate that members have first rights to athletic coach positions, Pelc said some 40 percent of high school coaches in Michigan are not on a school district staff. For them, signing a contract with PCMI can save them money, since they accrue no benefit when a school district pays a portion of their salary into a school employee retirement system from which they will not collect.

Despite protests from groups that cannot impose compulsory dues on people who choose to contract with school districts, Pelc said this method is the wave of the future. Districts can use the savings to direct money back into classrooms, whether it be in the form of more teachers, higher salaries for teachers, new textbooks, improved technology or retiring debt.

"It's all about options, having the tools to be more effective and efficient," he said. "When you spend less money on X, you have more to spend on Y, with Y being the youth." ♦



K-Promise

continued from Page 1

places I've talked to a half dozen times, usually to more than one person."

Jorth said some people have asked to come and visit, although that is discouraged.

"There really isn't much to show them," he said. "We can tell them everything they need to know over the phone."

Announced in November 2005, The Kalamazoo Promise offers tuition to any public college or university in Michigan for graduates of KPS. Starting with the class of 2005, students enrolled since kindergarten who reside in the district receive 100 percent of tuition costs. There is a sliding scale, down to 65 percent, for students who enroll before ninth grade. A group of anonymous donors initiated the program.

Kathi Horton, president of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, told Michigan Education Report that a group of representatives from area colleges, school districts, foundations and chambers of commerce have been discussing how to start a similar program.

"We, like many, were captivated by the big splash Kalamazoo made," Horton said. "We came together and asked ourselves what we might do that would have a big effect on our area."

Horton said the Flint group isn't looking to replicate the exact Kalamazoo Promise, but they would like to create a program that would lead to a similar trickle down effect on school enrollment, college aspirations for students, economic development and the housing market.

"We're in the very initial stages," she said. "We meet about once and month and we're gathering information."

Two other programs come closest to mirroring Kalamazoo. In Hammond, Ind., "College Bound" is in its first year and is using tax revenues from riverboat gambling to pay about \$522,000 in scholarships for 111 high school graduates who are attend-

ing various Indiana public universities. Also based on a percentage scale, Hammond's program requires not only residency within the school district, but eligible students must live with a parent or guardian in a home they own within the city limits, according to the program's Web site.

In Newton, Iowa, the "Newton Promise" will start next year and use a combination of local sales tax money and private foundations to pay for college tuition, also with a sliding scale based on years of residency in the school district. The Newton Promise, however, differs slightly in that it also will pay for students who attend private college.

Jorth said although the K-Promise was in the planning and discussing stages for five years, once it was announced it did not take long to set up.

"It was announced in November, I was hired in March and now we have 350 kids in school," Jorth said. "Other places that want to start the same thing need to figure out two main issues: what's their funding source and what are their eligibility requirements."

Other similar programs include the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program, for students of families with less than \$50,000 a year income, who graduate with a minimum 2.5 grade point average in college preparatory classes. Participants can receive free tuition at Oklahoma public colleges and universities and partial tuition at private institutions. In Garrett County, Md., high school graduates who enroll full-time at Garrett College and maintain a 2.0 GPA can get the difference paid for between tuition and other aid for which they qualify. In Sullivan County, Tenn., high school graduates can receive free tuition at Northeast State Community College if they pursue an associate's degree and maintain a 2.0 GPA.

K-PROMISE IN YEAR TWO

When the Kalamazoo Promise was announced a year ago, it sent shock waves across southwest Michigan. Home values in the Kalamazoo Public Schools district went up, neighboring public school districts, local

charters and independent schools braced for a potential enrollment decline, and suddenly college became a reality for students who had never thought about it.

Enrollment in KPS is up about 100 compared to the start of the 2005 school year, including families that moved to Kalamazoo from as far away as Arizona and Hawaii to take advantage of the K-Promise, according to The Kalamazoo Gazette.

Of the students receiving K-Promise money, about 150 are attending Kalamazoo Valley Community College, which helped the two-year school attain an all-time high enrollment of more than 13,500. Another 100 students are at Western Michigan University, which in the wake of the K-Promise announcement said it would give free room and board this year to those students.

"That probably kept some kids from going to other schools, like a Central or an Eastern," Jorth said. "Western was able to shift some scholarship money they normally would have given Kalamazoo graduates, and they have those students apply for federal funding to pay the other costs. It was an extraordinary offer, but it's not really costing them much."

Jorth said about 36 Promise students are attending Michigan State University,

with 17 more at the University of Michigan. Others are scattered at smaller schools and a few at other community colleges.

"We had a few kids who weren't quite able to get into four-year schools, but they were told if they put in one good semester at KVCC, they could transfer," Jorth said. "We also have a few who will move the other way, and that's very smart of them."

Jorth said one student left Western Michigan after the first week of school and instead enrolled at KVCC.

"She just wasn't ready for the larger setting," he said. "But that's great. We're blessed to have a great community college, so it's better for those kids to be there than not going anywhere."

K-Promise recipients have 10 years to use four years worth of tuition, and can only apply it toward a bachelor's degree.

"Some kids will get an associate's degree, maybe work a few years, then go back for a bachelor's degree," Jorth said. "Others will go right through."

Jorth said he also expects some of the class of 2005 who originally decided to attend private schools or go out of state to return and enroll in the Promise.

"As long as they can get in (to college), they can get the money," he said. ♦

Catholic Schools

continued from Page 3

Another group, formed after last year's school closings in Detroit, received a \$50,000 grant from the Skillman Foundation to conduct a feasibility study for a co-ed high school within the city.

"They desperately want to maintain a presence," Gehringer said. "They are looking at establishing sponsorship, from religious communities and foundations, but it takes a while."

The school could be based on what is known as the Cristo Rey model, whereby students work at area businesses in jobs that pay 70 percent of their tuition costs. Similar schools are operating in 10 urban areas nationwide. During the 2005-2006 school year, some 2,450 were enrolled in Cristo Rey schools in Cambridge, Mass., Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Lawrence, Mass., Los Angeles, New York City, Portland, Ore., Tucson and Waukegan, Ill. The organization expects as many as eight new schools to open in the coming year, including Sacramento and Kansas City. ♦

SHORT SUBJECTS

continued from Page 1

The Ypsilanti schools want Gov. Jennifer Granholm to pardon a former bus driver who was forced to leave his job under new student safety laws. Superintendent James Hawkins called John Roberts, convicted of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, a "victim."

Catholic schools in the greater Flint area have developed a consortium to combine resources and keep tuition costs down in response to a survey of parents.

A Muskegon Montessori school has found success with year-round school. Michigan Dunes, which had just nine students in K-3 at the start of the 2005-2006 school year, saw enrollment climb to 55 after announcing the change.

Private citizens raised \$30,000 to purchase science lab equipment for Bay-Arenac Community High School, a charter public school for at risk students. The equipment included chemical-resistant tables, microscopes, beakers and flasks.

The teachers union in Montgomery County, Maryland, charged political candidates as much as \$6,000 each to publicize the fact that the union had endorsed them. Of the 46 partisan candidates the union endorsed, 44 were Democrats.

A study by the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation shows that schools in Milwaukee and Cleveland that accept voucher students are less segregated than public schools in those cities.

Administrators in the Essexville-Hampton schools will get raises rang-

ing from 2 to 17 percent, while teachers in the district agreed to give up yearly and longevity raises this year.

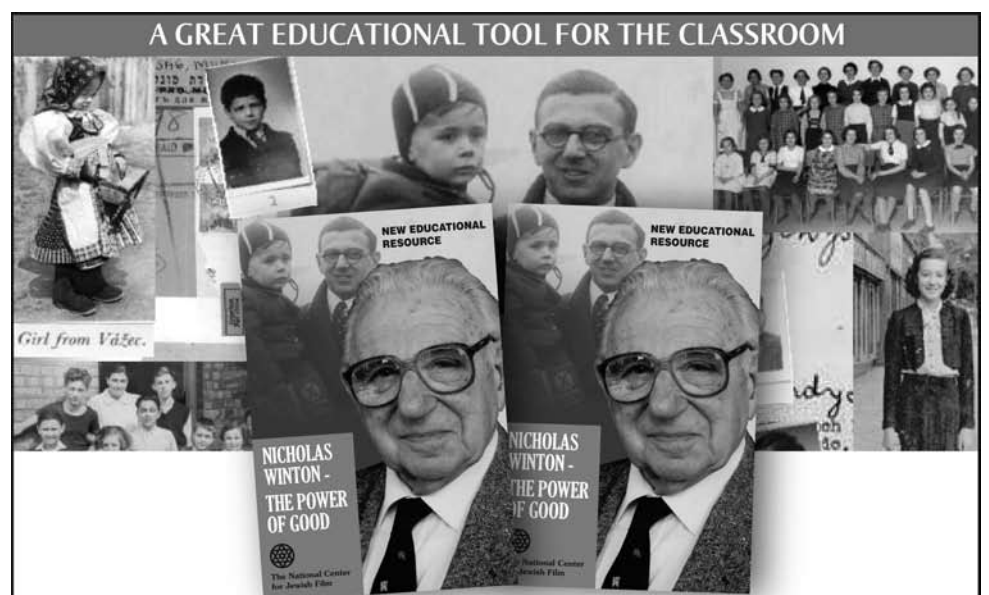
The teachers union in Nashville, Tenn., rejected a \$400,000 private gift that would have given merit raises based on student performance. Teachers would have been eligible to receive between \$2,000 and \$6,000 each if students in the district's two lowest performing schools would have increased overall performance compared to last year.

A proponent of trimesters predicts the number of schools using the method will double by next year. Mark Westerburg, assistant superintendent at Spring Lake Public Schools in west Michigan, said MEAP scores in the district have increased since its high school moved to trimesters seven years ago.

The Chicago Teachers Union is suing Chicago Public Schools to halt an on-line school, claiming it is the same as home-schooling and should not be publicly funded. Under Renaissance 2010, CPS wants to close underperforming schools and open 100 new schools that are run in new and unique ways.

A study at Harvard University said independent school students do better than public school students when variables such as race and income are left out of the equation. The researchers looked at math and reading scores for fourth- and eighth-graders.

A private consulting firm discovered that New York City schools was spending \$20 million a year on busing for students who do not use the transportation. Students must now register for bus service, and companies that provide busing will only be paid for students who actually ride on them. ♦



NICHOLAS WINTON, a stockbroker on holiday who saw the plight of Jewish children in Prague and knew he had to take action.

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Cap lifted on Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

“Coalition of strange bedfellows” wins political victory

The Wisconsin Legislature may have voted to increase the number of students who can participate in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, but Susan Mitchell believes it's the votes of the parents that count most.

“When the parents can vote with their feet, people sit up and take notice,” Mitchell, president of School Choice Wisconsin, said at a K-12 Education Reform Summit held in Milwaukee recently. “It has and will continue to spur a great deal of community renewal, because when parents show they are willing to go out of their way to drive this and send their children to other schools, then private investors and philanthropic organizations will build new seats.”

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program began in 1990 with seven schools and 337 students. It has grown now to include 125 schools and has room for 22,500 students. MPCP, commonly called a voucher program, gives low-income parents about \$6,500 per student to use at a variety of schools – public and private – to which they prefer to send their children. Milwaukee Public Schools receives roughly \$10,000 in state aid for each student enrolled.

POLITICAL FIGHT

Since its inception, MPCP has withstood numerous legislative, court and public relations challenges, turning Milwaukee into what Mitchell calls the “largest array of educational options for parents in any urban setting in the country.”

Courts have ruled that the MPCP is constitutional because the intent of the program is for parents to seek a better education for their children, rather than an attempt by the state to use government money to promote a particular religion. While parochial schools were included in the mix in 1995, MPCP is not limited to schools of a particular denomination or religion.

Those who have supported the rights of parents to choose the best school for their children, Mitchell says, make up a coalition of strange bedfellows.

“We cross all religious, ethnic, socio-economic and political lines,” Mitchell said. “Our determination is to remain united in policy and strategy, which is easy to say but hard to do.”

The Wisconsin Legislature three times passed a law to increase the cap on the number of low-income students eligible for the program, and all three times Gov. Jim Doyle responded with a veto. School choice supporters created a political action committee, spending \$1.5 million in direct and indirect contributions to help pro-school choice legislators. An almost daily demonstration at the state capitol, including visits by students asking legislators to lift the cap, helped sway public opinion, but Doyle remained opposed.

Two Milwaukee-area Democrats in the Wisconsin Legislature broke ranks with their caucus and have been vocal supporters of school choice, sometimes at the expense of being accepted by their colleagues.

“I’m a Democrat and I support school choice,” Sen. Jeff Plale announced to the education reform summit attendees. “I’m a product of public schools, my kids go to public schools, but when you see kids at the mall, they don’t have signs on their chests that tell you if they go to public or private school.”

Plale said the fight to lift the cap lead opponents to institute a theory of “death by a thousand cuts,” that has attempted to chip away at the ability of parents to choose what is best for their children.

“Even today, people would love to wave a magic wand and make it all go away,” Plale said. “But to play politics with these kids’ lives is extremely distasteful. Families make



Students are shown at St. Anthony Catholic School in Milwaukee. The school, which participates in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, has doubled enrollment in the past two years.

life-long decisions on where to live based on schools.”

Jason Fields, a state representative from Milwaukee, said he is told over and over by his Democrat colleagues that his support for vouchers is wrong.

“We have a situation where 66 percent of African-American men in the Milwaukee Public Schools don’t graduate, and as a black man that concerns me,” Fields said. “I ask my caucus for solutions and no one will step up to the plate, but yet they say I’m wrong?”

Fields said his colleagues often respond that the Milwaukee Public Schools need more money in order to operate better.

“The outstate schools get less money and graduate a lot more kids,” Fields said. “You can’t tell me more money is the answer.”

Republicans in the legislature have been split over the MPCP, too. Leah Vukmir, a Republican state representative from the Milwaukee area, said Republicans in other parts of the state come under fire from their constituents because some people believe the MPCP sends more money to Milwaukee that otherwise should go to their school districts.

After months of discussions, it appeared Doyle would veto the cap increase once again. Supporters, however, including the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, responded with radio and television ads that featured parents and children who had benefited from the program pleading not to be denied education options. One television ad featured a father asking why it was OK for Doyle’s son to attend a private school, but not other children. In the end, Doyle agreed to raise the cap in exchange for a guarantee that voucher schools would submit to more state accreditation and accountability standards.

RESULTS

Ken Johnson, a former president of the Milwaukee Public Schools board of education, was and remains a supporter of parental choice.

“The main driver was that people didn’t want to see the (public school) monopoly end,” he said. “Their feeling was, you will come here whether you like it or not. How can that serve students or parents?”

As MPCP grew and parents were given more options for educating their children, Johnson said he knew MPS had to respond.

“If you’re not willing to close schools that do no perform, what message are you communicating to the personnel, the parents and the students?” he said. “That they don’t count?”

Various studies over the years have shown two things have occurred since the inception of the MPCP: students who attend the voucher schools have performed better academically, and so have their counterparts

in the public schools from which eligible voucher students come.

Since choice became available in 1990, enrollment in Milwaukee Public Schools has increased 7.4 percent, while its graduation rate, performance on standardized tests and per pupil spending have all gone up. The dropout rate and the number of schools the state identified for improvement both fell.

“With the parent choice program, we have many different models by which parents can choose,” MPS Superintendent William Andrekopoulos said. “When you have that, no longer is MPS a monopoly. That competitive nature has raised the bar for educators in Milwaukee to provide a good product or they know that parents will simply walk.”

SCHOOLS

Attendees of the school reform summit were given the opportunity to tour some of the schools that participate in the choice program. At St. Anthony School, enrollment has more than doubled since 2003, where 99 percent of the students are Hispanic and 99 percent qualify for free or reduced-cost lunches. Terry Brown, the school’s president, credits the increase in students, from 400 to almost 900, with the decision to adopt direct instruction and core knowledge teaching philosophies.

“It’s one thing to start a new school and create a reform model,” Brown said. “It’s another thing to take a school that’s been in existence for 130 years and switch gears, but we felt we had to do it to be just to the children and just to the taxpayers.”

Students at St. Anthony, for example, study history chronologically, while math and English instruction stresses mastery.

“There’s wide latitude for teachers in how to present things, but the content is determined,” Brown said. “We don’t want the rain forest being taught three times in grade school but never have any mention of the War of 1812.”

Students, many of whom are classified as English Language Learners, have a two and a half-hour reading block each morning, followed by 50 minutes of spelling and grammar, then an hour of math.

Brown said the school stresses student achievement because it feels a responsibility to do so in return for the voucher money. Families of only eight students at the school can afford to pay tuition.

“Market forces should determine whether or not a school stays open,” Brown said. “We offer music and art, which MPS is cutting, and we’re able to do this with a lot less money.”

Located in what has been called “Satan’s backyard,” Hope Christian Schools focus on urban education and social justice, according to Superintendent Kole Kneuppel.

“We believe in the power of kids and the parents who choose to make a difference,” Kneuppel said. “We try to be a positive envi-

ronment and a great place to send kids.”

Metcalfe Park, the neighborhood where Hope’s elementary, middle and high schools are located, is plagued by an unemployment rate in the low 30s and an even higher percentage of adults without a high school diploma. At Hope Academy, high school students arrive for classes early, playing chess and listening to classical music in the gymnasium. Students can stay until 5 p.m., and many attend from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays.

“We have a bunch of great teachers,” Kneuppel said. “They are willing to do anything and everything to help the students.”

Teachers are required to provide students with their cell phone numbers, and many will take students on spontaneous field trips to museums, the zoo or even a Friday night football game.

“When the student feels that love from the teacher, and knows they can call any time, they can’t sit in class and say they didn’t understand the homework,” Kneuppel said. “We talk a lot about social justice, but not just out of pity. We hold them accountable to real world standards, because ultimately, excuses harm them.”

THE FUTURE

Mitchell and the others who support the rights of parents to decide what educational setting is best and safest for their children know the increase cap will soon be met and the battle will continue.

“There are so many more families who desperately want something better for their children,” she said. “There could be a lot more than 22,500 enrolled if the supply could keep up with the demand.”

Mitchell said as many as 70,000 children could be eligible for MPCP if that many seats were available, and thousands more in other Wisconsin cities also would qualify if the program were to be expanded beyond Milwaukee. She knows it will not be easy.

“The results notwithstanding, we’ve been under steady attack,” she said. “In 2001, when the cap was increased to 10,000 children, we thought they’d leave us alone. We were dead wrong. The legislature tried to reduce the amount of funding.”

Plale said no battle is “too petty,” for those who oppose parental choice. He related a story about a Catholic school in his district that literally sits half in the city of Milwaukee and half outside. It applied to participate in the program, but was rejected because of that technicality.

Ultimately, parental choice supporters agree that student learning is the bottom line.

“When kids thrive in school and get better jobs, the economy thrives and when the economy thrives we all benefit,” Plale said. “There’s no reason for anyone to set up hurdles and put this program in peril. We shouldn’t be fighting the same battles (over and over).” ♦

| COMMENTARY

Reforming America's mandatory representation



Thomas W. Washburne

A young teacher reads about a job opening at a local school. She applies, completes an interview and is told she will be hired. But there is a catch. In order to have the job, she must pay a certain percentage of her wages to an organization that promotes views different from her own — many of which are on issues entirely removed from those affecting her job. Nearly half of the people working at the school share her opinion of the organization, but the law states that the tribute must be paid by everyone who works there. To make matters worse, every public school in the district is affiliated with this organization.

Consider another scenario: A long-time employee of a manufacturer discovers that just over half of his coworkers have decided to support a new organization. Individual dues to this group are several hundred dollars per year, and its agenda runs counter to his own beliefs. To make matters worse, he likes his employer and has always been treated fairly. He is not alone. But that's too bad; the law compels him to pay the fees and allow the organization to represent him. He must pay the fees or find another job, forgoing years of accumulated goodwill and benefits.

What nation would require people to contribute to or join an organization as a requirement of certain jobs? Cuba? The People's Republic of China? No, this infringement on the right of free association takes place right here in the United States.

Today, 12.5 percent of American workers are forced by law to negotiate through a union. Yet few Americans understand just how a union operates or how it achieves its position. This is unfortunate, for if more freedom-loving Americans were aware of this situation, they might champion the rights of those whose liberty is being trampled.

Federal labor law, which is mirrored by Michigan law, was established in the midst of the Great Depression and has at its core radical provisions that were enacted as a response to difficult times. The law stipulates that if only 30 percent of workers in a firm publicly call for union representation, they are entitled to a secret ballot election to decide whether to certify a union. If more than 50 percent vote in favor of certification, the entire group of employees becomes bound to union representation. Dues must be paid to the union, and people can be fired for refusing to comply.

It is not difficult to see how federal and state labor law came into being. Times were tough and politicians were eager to try almost anything to restore economic prosperity. But in the decades since, and in light of the fact that there is now a body of state and federal laws protecting workers in everything from discrimination to reasonable pay periods, it is hard to see the benefit of compelled union representation for workers.

Indeed, our principles as Americans demand that we ask why and how it is that in the land of the free an employee can be compelled as a condition of employment to pay fees to a union they determine they don't want or need?

One answer is that most unions are historical vestiges. They have been in existence for decades and the law makes it difficult to decertify them. A decertification election can only be held when a negotiated bargaining agreement has expired. If the union files an unfair labor practice charge against an employer, this too can delay decertification. Consequently, most union members have never voted to certify the union to which they pay dues or fees.

Secondly, the unions are entrenched. Organized labor is big business. For decades, union bosses — supported by forced union-

| COMMENTARY

Introducing a hero to Michigan students



Benjamin D. Stafford

Teaching World War II to children can be difficult because of its apparent bleakness. But sometimes it is the darkest of days that brings out the compassion and good in a few souls. One of the unsung heroes from World War II is Sir Nicholas Winton. His story is inspiring and a useful tool to those wishing to teach about not only the evil of the war but also the good that was done.

In the fall of 1938, many Europeans were lulled into complacency by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who thought he had pacified Adolf Hitler by handing him a large chunk of Czechoslovakia at Munich in late September. Winston Churchill, who would succeed Chamberlain in 1940, was among those who believed otherwise. So was Nicholas Winton, then a 29-year-old London stockbroker.

Having made many business trips to Germany in previous years, Winton was well aware of Jews being arrested, harassed and beaten. Hitler's increasingly aggressive anti-Semitism and Germany's occupation of the Sudetenland in October 1938 spurred a tide of refugees, many of whom were Jewish. Thousands fled to as-yet unoccupied Czechoslovakia, especially to Prague.

Winton canceled a year-end ski trip to Switzerland when a friend asked him to come to Prague instead to show him the refugee problem. It would have been easy to assume there was nothing a lone foreigner could do to assist so many trapped families. Winton could have ignored the situation and taken his vacation in Switzerland, stepping back into the comfortable life.

Getting all the children who sought safety to a country that would accept them seemed an impossible challenge. Back in London, he wrote to governments around the world, pleading for an open door, only to be rejected by every one (including the United States) but two: Sweden and Great Britain. He assembled a small group of volunteers to assist with the effort. Even his mother pitched in.

The London team's counterpart in Prague was a Brit named Trevor Chadwick,

who gathered information from parents who wanted their children out, then forwarded the details to Winton homes. There were 5,000 children on his lists. At no charge, British newspapers published Winton's advertisements to stir interest and highlight the urgent need for foster parents. When enough homes could be found for a group of children, Winton submitted the necessary paperwork to the Home Office.

Winton led the effort to raise funds to pay for the operation. The expenses included the 50 British pounds the Home Office required for each child (the equivalent of \$3,500 per child in today's dollars) to cover any future costs of repatriation.

Picture the unimaginable: the railway station in Prague when anguished parents and relatives loaded the children onto the trains and said what would be for most, their final goodbyes.

The first 20 of "Winton's children" left Prague on March 14, 1939. Hitler's troops overran all of Czechoslovakia the very next day, but the volunteers kept working, sometimes forging documents to slip the children past the Germans. By the time World War II broke out on Sept. 1, the rescue effort had transported 669 children out of the country by rail in eight separate groups.

Vera Gissing, one of the children Winton saved, is now in her late 70s. She puts the rescue mission in perspective: "Of the 15,000 Czech Jewish children taken to the camps, only a handful survived. Winton had saved a major part of my generation of Czech Jews."

Why did he do it? It certainly was not for the plaudits it might bring him. Indeed, he never told anyone about his achievement for half a century. Not until 1988, when his wife stumbled across a musty box of records and a scrapbook while cleaning their attic, did the public learn of Winton's story. The scrapbook, a memento put together by his volunteers when the operation shut down, was filled with documents and pictures of Czech children.

In "The Power of Good," a recent International Emmy Award-winning documentary from Czech producer Matej Minac, Winton says he kept quiet about the rescue mission because, "It was such a small part of my life." In fact, the operation spanned only eight months, while he was

still working at the stock exchange, and it was prior to his marriage.

"When the war started and the transports stopped, I immediately went into the RAF (Royal Air Force), where I stayed for the next five years. When peace came, what was a 35-year-old man to do, traverse the country looking for boys and girls?" At the end of the war, Winton was busy re-starting his own life. What he did to save so many others just six years earlier was behind him, and over. For all that he knew, the children might have returned to their homeland (as some had). "Wherever they were, I had good reason to assume they were safe and cared for," he said. Indeed, among their ranks in later life would be doctors, nurses, therapists, teachers, musicians, artists, writers, pilots, ministers, scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and even a Member of the British Parliament. Today they and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren number about 5,000.

Their story, and that of Winton, eventually was told. In 1988, a television show seen across Britain, "That's Life," brought Winton together with many of his "children" for the first time since those horrific, fateful days of 1939. He is in regular correspondence with, and often visited by, many of them — which he says is a source of joy and comfort since his wife Grete passed away in 1999.

In cooperation with The Gelman Foundation of Ann Arbor, The Mackinac Center for Public Policy is offering copies of "The Power of Good," to teachers for \$15 for use as a teaching tool in the classroom. Jan Niefert, a teacher in Kalamazoo, has found the video more beneficial than books because it brings the history alive, while it is more age appropriate for her classes than "Schindler's List."

"We discussed the facts concerning Nazi Germany and the concentration camps, but I also lead the discussion to why only one man saw the need," Niefert said. "We also pondered at length how he could have never told his wife about it." ♦

Benjamin D. Stafford is an economics major at Hillsdale College and was a summer 2006 intern at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute headquartered in Midland, Mich. Stafford met and interviewed Winton on a trip to England in July 2006.

ization — have collected fees from members and built up huge cash reserves, as well as a number of individuals with vested interests in the union's continued existence. As such, employees seeking to decertify a union can simply be overwhelmed by a union's economic might.

Fortunately, the federal judiciary has noted the anti-freedom aspects of this system. The U.S. Supreme Court has confirmed in several cases that the federal Constitution prohibits forced membership, thereby allowing an employee to resign. However, employees who refuse to join a union may still be required to become a "fee payer." A fee payer, while not a union member, must pay an agency fee to the union for representing his or her interests in contract negotiations. This fee is substantial, and often constitutes an amount almost as large as the full union membership dues.

Even so, acquiring fee-payer status is no easy feat. Peer pressure on reluctant union members can be intense. Resigning from the union is also procedurally difficult. For example, teachers who belong to the Michigan Education Association can only resign from their union during the month of August. Such withdrawal "windows" have been upheld in Michigan as a reasonable administrative requirement.

The statistics bear out the difficulty of becoming a fee payer. With 157,000 members, the MEA recently reported that it has only 683 fee payers.

Like the federal courts, the U.S. Congress has set some boundaries on federal labor law. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 pro-

hibits union membership in situations where it conflicts with an employee's religious beliefs. But even in these cases the employee is usually required to surrender an amount equivalent to dues to a charity approved by the employee and the union.

Michigan has also attempted to limit some of the more egregious aspects of American labor law. In 1994, the Michigan Legislature enacted several amendments to the Michigan Campaign Finance Act. These changes, known as "paycheck protection," were designed to prohibit automatic employee contributions to a labor organization's political activities. While the amendments covered involuntary political contributions, it did not address the full range of non-workplace related expenditures, or provide the kind of transparency necessary for an employee to discover the full range of expenditures being funded by the dues.

Today's unions were constructed in a bygone era, and the collectivist ideologies that were their underpinning have been widely discredited both in theory and in practice. The American ideal of individual liberty and the realities of the 21st century global marketplace call for an overhaul of the compulsory aspects of the union system.

There are several options:

Establish Michigan as a "right to work" state. Federal law already allows for the state Legislature to prohibit the forced payment of fees to unions. Twenty-two states have protected workers from being compelled to make such coerced contributions. In cases where they desire it, workers should also be

permitted to negotiate their own terms of employment directly with employers.

Require regular certification elections, regardless of bargaining status. Employees should be permitted to decertify their union any time they see fit. Annual elections would be more democratic than perpetual terms of union authority.

Establish union-free zones. Where a particular industry is in financial trouble — facing bankruptcy, for example — companies could be allowed to operate without a collective union presence for a fixed period of time.

Move to a system of voluntary unionism. It is time for Michigan workers to throw off the shackles of a labor system that diminishes the value of the individual. Employees should be free to choose whether they want union representation, or would rather negotiate directly with their employer.

From its very foundation, America deemed liberty to be paramount. This respect for the individual and his or her ability to make independent choices has helped create the greatest economic engine on earth. America's secret collectivism — set forth in laws designed to entrench forced unionism — must be brought to light and reformed. ♦

Thomas W. Washburne is director of labor policy for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute headquartered in Midland, Mich. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the author and the Center are properly cited.

| COMMENTARY

The school choice movement's greatest failure



Andrew J. Coulson

Both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* in July jumped on the release of a new study by the National Center for Education Statistics. *The Wall Street Journal's* headline was particularly dramatic: "Long-Delayed Education Study Casts Doubt on Value of Vouchers."

No, it doesn't.

And it is a failure on my part, as well as a failure of the school choice movement as a whole, that the media don't understand why. More on the wisdom of this below.

Taking the study entirely at face value what the report says is this: Private school students consistently score better in math and reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress than public school students, but this advantage essentially goes away if you apply a particular set of controls for the differing student characteristics between the two sectors (things like wealth, race, and so on).

A vigorous free market in education requires that all families have easy access to the schools of their choice whether public or private.

Okay, you say, but if private schools don't significantly outscore public schools, what's the point of school voucher programs or other reforms that would give all parents access to the public or private school of their choice? Why, in other words, is *The Journal's* headline wrong?

It is wrong because the point of voucher programs is to create a competitive education industry, and the existing population of U.S. private schools does not constitute such an industry.

A vigorous free market in education requires that all families have easy access to the schools of their choice (whether public or private); that schools are not burdened with extensive regulations on what they can teach, whom they can hire and what they can charge, etc.; that consumers directly pay at least some of the cost of the service; that private schools not be discriminated against financially by the state in the distribution of education funding; and that at least a substantial minority of private schools be operated for profit.

This set of conditions does not exist in any state in the nation. Instead, American education is dominated by a 90 percent government monopoly that is funded entirely through taxation. The private sector occupies the remaining 10 percent niche, is almost exclusively operated on a nonprofit basis and is forced to charge thousands of dollars in tuition in the face of the "free" monopoly schools that spend an average of \$10,000 per pupil per year.

This is not a market. No study was necessary to point this out.

Competitive markets are characterized by innovation, inexorable improvements in cost effectiveness and the quality of goods and services, and the rapid growth of the most successful providers. None of this has occurred in the U.S. private education sector, precisely because that sector does not constitute a competitive market.

The last great innovation to transform classroom instruction occurred during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson (the invention of the chalkboard, around 1801). Since that time, the pace of

innovation has been so slow that a student from the mid-1800s would immediately recognize a typical modern classroom. The most sought-after private schools enroll only about a thousand more students today than they did a century ago. This degree of stagnation is unheard of outside of the education sector, because it is only in the education sector (at least in liberal democracies) that market activity has been so thoroughly extinguished by government monopoly provision.

Hence, this study of our small, non-market niche of private schools does not allow any generalization to the sort of outcomes to be expected from a true free market in education — and the creation of such a market is the primary justification for vouchers and other school choice policies.

If I were better at my job, and if the school choice movement as a whole had a more effective media machine, this fact would be widely understood and we wouldn't see fallacious headlines like the one cited above.

That major point having been made, let's take a look at the study's findings on their own merits, as an examination of the current crop of public versus private schools.

The first problem with the study is that it collects no data on per-pupil spending in public versus private schools. Private school tuition, according to the NCES itself, is about half of the average public school expenditure per pupil. While private schools have some other sources of revenue, they still spend thousands of dollars less per pupil than public schools, even after taking these other revenues into account. Private schools may be dramatically more efficient even if their absolute achievement levels are comparable to those in public schools.

Hence it is possible that if spending were equalized, private schools would raise student learning substantially compared to current levels. While it has been shown that spending and achievement are largely unrelated in the public sector, this has not been demonstrated in the private

American education is dominated by a 90 percent government monopoly that is funded entirely through taxation.

sector. In fact, evidence from developing countries suggests that higher spending in private schools DOES increase student achievement.

Next, it is worth observing the specifics of the study's findings. It reports that there is a small advantage to public schools in 4th grade math, but that this advantage is not present at the 8th grade. It further says that at the 8th grade, private school students have a small advantage over public school students in reading. One possible interpretation of these findings is that public school students fall behind their peers in private schools the longer they spend in the classroom.

That, of course, is only one possibility. At any rate, it is clear that parents are most concerned with what their children know and are able to do at the end of their K-12 education, so if, by the later grades, private schools confer a significant advantage, this would definitely seem to favor them.

METHODOLOGICAL AND DATA PROBLEMS

All of the above discussion takes the study's findings at face value. This may be ill-advised, since a preliminary review suggests that there may be real methodological problems and potentially serious data problems. Several of the control

variables used in the model seem problematic, including the following:

THE RATE OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

It is entirely possible that sectoral differences in the feeling of community or level of personal attention, ability of school staff to motivate students, etc., could affect student absenteeism. So it is erroneous to treat this as exogenous (i.e., as independent of school sector) and to control for it.

SCHOOL SIZE

This variable is clearly endogenous (i.e., affected by school sector). Parents tend to prefer schools in which teachers know all the students by name and which create a friendly, community atmosphere. This is much easier in smaller schools, and hence there is a competitive pressure not to get too large in the private education sector. No such pressure exists in the public sector, where contrary bureaucratic incentives encourage large school size. As a result, the average public school is roughly three times the size of the average private school: 521 students versus 182 students. It is thus unjustifiable to pretend that school size is independent of school sector.

THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN THE TITLE I PROGRAM

A report by the Congressional Budget Office notes that "About 97 percent of public schools and 45 percent of private schools participate in the school lunch program." This vast difference in level of participation by schools may have a significant effect on the share of eligible students who are in fact being served by the program.

SAMPLE SPECIFICATION PROBLEMS

Between a fifth and a quarter of the private schools selected for the study did not participate. The authors make no serious attempt to analyze non-participants to determine how and to what extent they might differ from participating schools in ways related to student performance. This could bias their results in unknown ways.

It seems likely that public and private sector schools apply the federal Specific Learning Disability label differentially. This label states that children are disabled if they perform at a level below what would be expected for students of their age and intelligence. It does account for the possibility that poor performance may be the result of poor instruction. Roughly 6 percent of all public school students are placed in this category, making up nearly half (43 percent) of all students classified as disabled in the public sector. Among private schools participating in this study, a total of 3 to 4 percent of students are classified as suffering from ANY disability, mental or physical. Because students classified as SLD can be excluded from the test taking pool or given extra time or other accommodations, differential SLD classification rates between the sectors may affect sectoral mean scores (because these students, by definition, perform below the average of their peers).

INSTRUMENT SELECTION

Tom Loveless has pointed out in a paper for the Brookings Institution that the NAEP mathematics test does a poor job of measuring the skills that it is purported to measure. Calculator use is allowed throughout, so the exam does not measure basic arithmetic ability. More advanced topics, such as algebra with fractions, are all but absent, making it a

poor test of these more advanced skills. If the two school sectors differ in either of these important areas, the NAEP will not detect it. It is natural for scholars to want to analyze the data they have, but readers should be aware of the shortcomings of those data as a measure of both basic and advanced mathematical ability.

Taking all of the above analysis together, this study's findings would have little bearing on market-based reforms like vouchers and tax credits even if the research were methodologically flawless. Even as a comparison of public schools and the existing (nonmarket) crop of private schools, this study leaves much to be desired because it neglects to consider the substantially higher per-pupil spending of public schools.

But the study, as noted above, is not methodologically flawless. Several of its control variables appear to be misspecified, and so its adjusted test score averages may be significantly biased. It makes no attempt to assess the impact of the non-participation by between a fifth and a quarter of all the private schools selected for participation in the study — another probable source of bias. And the study uses a mathematics test (the NAEP) that has been shown to do a poor job of assessing both basic arithmetic and more advanced mathematical skills, thus obfuscating possible differences in performance in these (rather important) areas among the students tested.

In a nutshell: This study does not say what some reporters think it says, and it may not even say what its own authors think it says. ♦

Andrew J. Coulson is director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute in Washington and an adjunct fellow for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, an independent educational and research institute headquartered in Midland, Mich.

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DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS

Should Michigan lift the cap on charter public schools?

YES: Everyone should have choices



Lisa Koski

When I entered kindergarten back in the early 1980s, my parents did not want to send me to the local neighborhood school. They said it lacked values education, had large class sizes and did not stress academics.

Instead, my mother and father scrimped and saved to send me to a parochial school until we moved in 1986 to a city where the schools had a better reputation. Back then, the only choice in education was public or private. It was the “haves” and “have nots.” Those parents who couldn’t afford private schools or a home in a better community had no choice but to send their children to the local school, even if it was underperforming.

Fast forward to 2006. Now an educator at a premiere Michigan charter public school, I see first hand the need for competition among schools. Students attending Trillium Academy in Taylor come not just from downriver communities, but surrounding areas such as Detroit, Westland, Dearborn and Ypsilanti. Parents choose Trillium and other charter public schools for myriad reasons.

First and foremost at Trillium is our comprehensive fine arts program that begins with the kindergarteners. All of our students receive education in visual art, drama, music, Spanish, physical education and technology. Many of my new students tell me their previous schools did not have those classes.

At Trillium, we work at educating the whole child, not just the academic portion. Because of our charter contract, the fine arts will NEVER be cut from our educational program.

Intertwined in the fine arts and general education curriculum is an additional component. Our teachers focus on a Montessori philosophy of differentiated instruction to allow students to achieve at their own pace.

It may sound impossible to instruct each child in a way that best suits him or her. Yet, because charter class sizes are small, we are able to more closely monitor individual achievement. In our classrooms, a visitor may see a general education teacher working with one cluster of children, a special education teacher working with another small group, while another team of students works independently.

More often than not, you will find gifted and talented, students with special needs, and grade-level achievers all working together in one

classroom. Numerous assessments have shown this approach is working.

Charter public schools must live up to stringent state regulations, legislative expectations and state school board scrutiny. Further, charters also answer to their educational service providers and the entity — usually a state university or community college — that granted their charter contract.

Giving parents a choice among schools helps to level the playing field for children of all socio-economic backgrounds.

Public education should not be a monopoly. Before the advent of charter schools, many districts were underachieving and had no motivation to improve. They received funding regardless of what was happening.

Now, with schools of choice, the money goes with the pupil. All schools are forced to live up to higher

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standards in order to keep their students. Higher standards come in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and school report cards. For the first time in the history of American education, there are consequences for failing schools.

Trillium Academy, in its fifth year of operation, is already close to capacity and many of the grades have waiting lists. Last April, parents were weeping with joy when their names were called to fill open seats at our school. Families whose names were not selected in a random lottery left frustrated and forlorn.

Many charter schools are experiencing similar situations, and many families register at more than one charter in the hopes of getting into one.

It is unbelievable that in this day and age, many children are “left behind” in schools that are not performing. They are left behind because of the lack of a good, solid education, and they are left behind because they are not given the same opportunities as others.

In our country, every child is entitled to a free, public education. Shouldn’t everyone be entitled to a *quality* education as well?

The need for more charter schools is clear.

Lisa Koski, the 2005 Michigan Association of Public School Academies Teacher of the Year, teaches second and third grades at Trillium Academy in Taylor



Janna Garrison

Proponents of charter schools continue the cap on the number of charter schools in Michigan, particularly those servicing Detroit. This would be a serious

mistake.

Charter schools are not a panacea. In fact, they may prove ultimately to be the entities that cripple the traditional institutions, which will most likely remain responsible for educating the bulk of our children, the traditional public school.

For starters, too many existing charter schools are operating with teachers who do not have valid teaching certificates. Many of these teachers also do not meet the standards for being rated “highly-qualified” as stipulated under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which is a staple of the Bush administration’s education initiative.

While many charter school teachers have gained limited experience teaching as substitutes, especially in Detroit, others simply have been found to be relying on knowledge gained through other types of work experience. This widespread lack of pedagogical training in charter schools has a direct correlation to the performance of their students.

Recent studies have revealed that the majority of students attending charter schools have fared worse on standardized achievement tests than their traditional public school counterparts. What makes this fact particularly alarming is that most charter schools engage in what is known as “creaming,” accepting only students who tend to perform better

academically and behaviorally in school, and ignoring those who may have special needs and therefore cost more to educate. But studies are showing that even the creamed students are not performing as well in charter schools.

Finally, charter schools tend to lose students after “count day,” when parents, realizing that a charter school was not all it was cracked up to be, return their children to a traditional neighborhood public school. Unfortunately the funding does not follow. This forces the neighborhood school to educate more students with fewer resources.

The education of our children is much too important for them to be used as financial pawns for “for-profit” organizations, especially in

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today’s global economy. Viable alternatives are fine when there is a level playing field with comparable expectations, requirements and standards.

But dividing already limited resources between traditional public schools and charter schools services neither entity adequately. The same energy and resources used to try to expand the number of charter schools, and in essence water down the quality of public education, should be used to invest fully in traditional public schools where the majority of students (approximately 90 percent) will receive their education.

Janna K. Garrison is president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers

Charter public school facts

Michigan moved toward allowing charter public schools in 1993, when the legislature overhauled the School State Aid act. Coupled with the passage of Proposal A in 1994, school funding shifted to a “foundation allowance,” or a per-pupil amount of tax dollars, that follows a student to whatever public school they attend. With the advent of such a system, limited school choice was born in Michigan, allowing parents in participating districts to choose what school their child will attend, rather than sending them to the school to which they had been assigned. Charter public schools, also called “public school academies,”

receive the minimum foundation allowance for each student enrolled, and have no physical geographic boundaries, nor can they levy extra millages. There was no cap on charter public schools until 1996, when the legislature imposed a graduated system, raising the cap from 85 that year to the current 150. The cap only applies to charter public schools authorized by universities. Conventional school districts, local educational service agencies and community colleges can also authorize charter public schools. Today, there are 229 authorized charter public schools in Michigan.

Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of *Michigan Education Report*.
Tell us what you think: “Should Michigan lift the cap on charter public schools?”
Send your comments to the following address:

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