

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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SHORT SUBJECTS

A Macomb County judge upheld the hiring of six teachers from a private company by Armada Area Schools and criticized the Armada Education Association for requesting a temporary restraining order against the move. The long-term substitute teachers were hired in January as a cost-saving move. The teachers' union claimed the hiring violated its collective bargaining agreement, but Judge Donald Miller said the teachers' union appeared more worried about pay than about education.

Hazel Park Schools saved a program for at-risk 4-year-olds by hiring nonunion teachers at a lower cost. An article in the Madison-Park News said the district considered eliminating the program because grant money did not cover the costs, but that the district and the Hazel Park Education Association agreed that the district should hire three nonunion teachers for the program at a substantially lower wage than the union contract requires.

Five companies submitted bids to the Buchanan school district to provide custodial services in response to the district's request for proposals. Bidders were asked to give the district's current 12 custodial workers first consideration when planning staffing, according to a report in the South Bend Tribune. Bids ranged from about \$360,000 to \$560,000. School officials said increases in health care premiums and retirement costs prompted the district to seek cost savings through contracting.

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STUDY

School district consolidation not a big money-saver

Midsized Michigan school districts tend to spend less per pupil than smaller or larger ones do, but forcing smaller districts to merge would probably not have a large impact on education spending in Michigan, a new study says.

The study, titled "School District Consolidation, Size and Spending: an Evaluation," was commissioned by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, which publishes Michigan Education Report. The study's author is Andrew J. Coulson, director of the Cato Institute Center for Educational Freedom and an adjunct fellow with the Mackinac Center.

Based on analyses of district size, per-pupil operating spending and a variety of factors statistically associated with district expenditures, Coulson concludes that districts of roughly 2,900 students tend to have lower per-pupil operating expenditures.

"Both smaller and larger districts are likely to spend more per pupil, other things being equal," Coulson writes in the study. While he origi-

CONSOLIDATION, Page 2

DETROIT MAYOR CALLS FOR MORE CHARTER, PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Charter superintendent: 'He crossed a Rubicon there. That was a big step.'

If the seven-year history of University Preparatory Academy in Detroit has proven anything, it is that high dropout rates and low college enrollment are not inevitable in large urban public school systems, the school's top administrator said. But even as the academy, a charter school, prepares for its first graduation ceremony, Superintendent Doug Ross said the work in Detroit has just begun.

"What we still have a long way to go on is fully closing the achievement gap," Ross told Michigan Education Report. He added later, "Until we're able to graduate kids who are academically competitive with kids coming out of Birmingham, we are still not a success. That is our next goal."

Toward that goal, Ross currently has the support of Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick. In a visit to University Prep's ninth-grade class in March, Kilpatrick helped kick off a campaign called "Detroit's Great Hope." According to media reports, Kilpatrick told the students that there is more to education in Detroit than Detroit Public Schools. He told reporters that he wanted to add more charter



Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick in an interview. (AP Photo/ Carlos Osorio)

and private schools to the education mix in the city, saying Detroit needs to view the education of its children in total. Kilpatrick also said that he had been meeting privately with charter and private school leaders, including Ross, for ideas on model schools.

"He crossed a Rubicon there," Ross said of the mayor's statements to the ninth-graders. "That was a big step."

It also was a change in direc-

tion for the mayor, who in 2003 withdrew his support for an offer of \$200 million to build 15 new charter high schools in Detroit. Kilpatrick had originally supported the offer from philanthropist Bob Thompson, but changed course in the face of stiff opposition from the Detroit Federation of Teachers. Since then, however, enrollment figures show that thousands of students who are assigned to

CHARTERS, Page 8

MESSA REPORTS \$65 MILLION REVENUE GAIN IN ONE YEAR

The third-party administrator that sells health care benefits to a majority of Michigan school districts reported net assets of nearly \$270 million as of June 30, 2006, including an increase in assets of approximately \$129 million in the 2005-2006 fiscal year. That compares to net assets of \$119 million and an \$88 million net increase the previous year. The Michigan Education Special Services Association said in its annual report that those numbers reflect its overall operation, including all medical, vision, life and disability coverage.

In its medical plan alone, MESSA reported that it collected approximately \$1.19 billion in premiums, while the cost of medical benefits amounted to approximately \$1 billion. Adding in administrative and other expenses, the total expense for the medical plan was \$1.13 billion, the report says, giving the association an approximately \$65 million gain in the medical plan. This was the second consecutive year the organization reported a net gain.

MESSA is a third-party administrator established by and affiliated with the Michigan Education Association, a school employees union. It purchases insurance plans from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and then resells those packages to school districts. While the amount the association collected in premiums was about 5.4 percent more than the total expense of the medical plan, the gain is not called "profit" by MESSA, a not-for-profit Voluntary Employees' Benefit Association.

The gain MESSA realized will be held by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan in

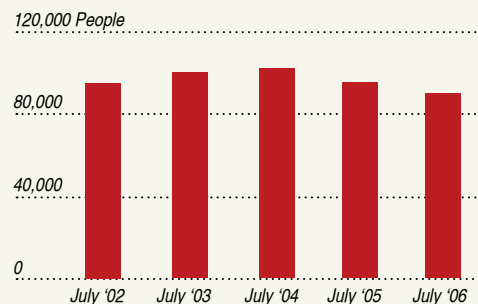
what is called a rate stabilization reserve, the report said. According to the report, the gain is credited back to the plan over future years, as is the interest earned on premiums paid in advance and any cost savings from incentive programs. The reserve stood at \$79 million as of June 30, 2006.

"This improved financial picture is welcome news as it will help MESSA to moderate rates in the upcoming 2007-2008 renewal," the report states. Gary Fralick, MESSA director of communications and government relations, declined to discuss the report with Michigan Education Report. A Michigan legislator called the gains "a bit outrageous" in the face of

MESSA, Page 2

EDUCATION AT A GLANCE

Enrollees in MESSA medical plan 2002-2006



Source: MESSA 2006 annual report (Does not include dependents)

NATION

Utah lawmakers approve vouchers, opponents push referendum

Opponents of a new law giving families in Utah more choice in their own children's education have gathered enough signatures to force the issue to a statewide vote.

The group opposes Utah's new "Parent Choice in Education Act," which will provide nearly every Utah parent with school-aged children a voucher worth \$500 to \$3,000, depending on their annual income. The voucher could be used at any eligible independent school. Any student currently enrolled in public school is eligible for a voucher; state enrollment data show that more than 95 percent of Utah students are enrolled in public schools. The plan will give parents more choice by making private school tuition more affordable.

Children already enrolled in private schools also could receive a voucher if their family incomes are below 185 percent of federal poverty guidelines. Census data indicate that about 20 percent of Utah private school families will qualify. In addition, all children will be eligible for vouchers when they first enter kindergarten, regardless of family income, which means that every Utah child will be eligible for the program by 2020.

"Utahns for Public Schools," the opposition group, is made up primarily of public

UTAH VOUCHERS, Page 4

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CONTRACT SETTLED

Millington to collect union dues again

A new contract in Millington provides raises for teachers and continued health insurance coverage through the Michigan Education Special Services Administration, with a cap on the amount the district will pay for premiums and higher co-pays for prescription medication.

"I look at the contract as good for our board and our employees," Superintendent Lawrence Kroswek told Michigan Education Report. The Millington Board of Education had voted early in negotiations to stop collecting union dues on behalf of the Millington Education Association and also to refuse any binding arbitration not required by law as "an incentive to get people to come to the table," Kroswek said.

The district plans to resume collecting union dues, according to Kroswek, although in the interim the association had arranged for members to pay dues to an account at a local credit union.

The new contract takes effect July 1 and runs through the 2008-2009 school year. The teacher salary schedule will not increase this year, but teachers will receive a payment equal to 0.5 percent of their salary, Kroswek said. The schedule will increase by 1.25 percent in 2007-2008 and 1.5 percent in 2008-2009. Teachers will move from what is called a \$5/\$10 prescription drug co-pay to a \$10/\$20 payment. The district will pay for up to an 8.5 percent increase in insurance costs, he said, but teachers must pay any increase after that.

"As long as they (the HEA) had a MESSA product, they were willing to settle," he said. MESSA is a third-party administrator affiliated with the Michigan Education Association that packages and resells insurance plans to school districts. Some Michigan school districts have moved away from MESSA in recent years, citing cost savings by purchasing insurance from another provider or by joining an insurance pool. In other districts, teachers have agreed to shift to a less-expensive MESSA PPO package or agreed to pay part of their own health care premium. Kroswek estimated the new contract will save the district \$80,000 over three years.

The new contract also increases teachers' supervisory and instructional time. The previous contract called for up to 6.25 instructional hours per day; the new one calls for 6.35. It also maintains a 180-day school calendar.

Michigan Education Report was not able to reach James Peresta, president of the Millington teachers union, for comment.

The Lansing Board of Education had also voted to stop collecting union dues on behalf of the Lansing Schools Education Association after a massive "sick-out" by teachers in February. More than 700 teachers were absent on Feb. 5, when the district and teachers union were in contract negotiations. The school board and teachers have since ratified a new contract. ♦

MESSA

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financial pressure on public schools.

"I think they're uncalled for ... particularly since school districts are being bombarded by financial issues," Rep. Brian Palmer, R-Romeo, told Michigan Education Report. "Every new dollar we give them (school districts) is going into the black hole of retirement and health care. ... It doesn't help education."

The \$65 million net gain reported by MESSA would equal about \$41 for every student enrolled in a conventional public school district in Michigan, based on state data putting the number of full-time equivalent students in those districts at approximately 1.58 million as of March.

Former chairman of the House Education Committee, Palmer has tried unsuccessfully in past years to push through legislation that would require insurance administrators like MESSA to release aggregate claims data on individual school districts. Supporters said such laws would allow other insurance companies to make competitive bids and bring overall health benefit costs down. But MESSA has said that the move could allow companies to "cherry-pick" only low-cost districts, leaving the rest to pay higher premiums.

MESSA has announced an average increase of under 3 percent in next year's rates.

In her written introduction to the report, Executive Director Cynthia Irwin said MESSA raised rates by a smaller amount than expected in 2005-2006 because of slower growth in medical costs and a dramatic shift away from MESSA's most expensive coverage plan to its less costly preferred provider options. Enrollment

in the preferred provider plans increased by 620 percent in two years, the report noted. About 60 percent of MESSA members are now in PPO plans, up from 6 percent two years ago. In contrast, membership in the more expensive traditional plan, called Super Care, fell by more than half.

Most of that shift played out at bargaining tables across Michigan, as local school employee unions and school districts engaged in heated debates over employee health benefits in general and the cost of MESSA packages in particular. In addition to shifting to MESSA PPO plans, many districts and teachers settled contracts that save money by requiring teachers to pay more out of pocket for prescription drugs and giving them a financial incentive to buy generic drugs. Other districts have agreed to contracts in which teachers pay part of their own health care premium or in which teachers agree to lower pay raises in exchange for maintaining MESSA coverage. Some districts have chosen a different insurance provider altogether, and a group of districts in West Michigan have jointly formed a self-insurance pool.

In Bay City Public Schools, for example, the district switched carriers from MESSA directly to Blue Cross Blue Shield for its administrators and support personnel, while teachers shifted to the preferred provider plan. Early estimates were that the district would save \$2 million as a result.

"It's like trying to move a mountain to move teachers to another health care plan," Glen Baracy, superintendent for Wayne-Westland Schools, told the Detroit Free Press in a March article. MESSA insures

900 teachers in the district.

Baracy said Wayne-Westland saved 14 percent on health insurance for administrators and office staff by switching to the School Employees Trust and School Employers Group, which also uses Blue Cross benefits plans.

"It's their way or the highway," Palmer said of MESSA. "They only want their own system in there. That, to me, does not bode well for saying, 'We are all for helping kids.'"

The number of people enrolled in the MESSA medical plan increased during the years 2002 to 2004, but has declined each year since. There were approximately 88,000 people enrolled as of July 2006, down from approximately 96,000 and 100,500 in 2005 and 2004, respectively. When enrollees' dependents are included, the total number of individuals covered through MESSA medical programs in the past year averaged 260,000.

MESSA's annual report also noted that during the 2005-2006 reporting year:

- About 54 percent of MESSA payments were spent on outpatient services, with another 27 percent on prescription drugs.

- Pregnancy and/or childbirth accounted for 25 percent of all inpatient services, totaling \$26 million, at an average cost of \$6,400.

- Approximately 3.1 million medical prescriptions were filled statewide, down from 3.2 million the previous year. MESSA paid out more for Lipitor, a brand name drug used to treat high cholesterol, than for any other medication, totaling \$10.1 million. ♦

CONSOLIDATION

continued from Page One

nally set out to study the potential cost savings of consolidating smaller districts, the analyses showed that the theoretical savings from forcing small districts to merge would be only one-twelfth the theoretical savings from breaking up larger districts.

At best, Coulson says, "rough, ballpark figures" show potential annual savings of approximately \$31 million through small-district mergers and approximately \$363 million through large-district breakups. However, in either case, the full gains would only be realized if all small districts could be consolidated and all large districts could be divided into districts of optimal size, an unlikely event because of geography and practicality alone, he points out. Approximately 70 percent of Michigan's conventional public school students are enrolled in districts the study finds to be overly large.

The study also concludes that district size only accounts for about 2 percent of the variation in per-pupil spending across districts, and that size is much less important to per-pupil spending than the district's total income divided by its enrollment — a measure of how easy it would be in theory for districts to increase per-pupil spending.

"If legislators and the governor wish to address the spiraling cost of public schooling, this study points to a far more important factor than district size: the incentive structure of the system itself. The model developed here indicates that public school districts generally endeavor to spend — and succeed in spending — as much as they can," the study says.

Consolidation of school district services — as opposed to school districts themselves — is one topic under discussion at the state level, as legislators and policymakers discuss ways to address shortfalls in the education budget. Gov. Jennifer Granholm, in her 2007 State of the State address, called for schools to share noninstructional services as a cost-saving measure. That idea has been echoed by Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan.

"I don't think consolidation of school districts is the first step," Flanagan said in an April podcast posted on the Michigan Department of Education Web site. "There may be some of that that needs to happen, but frankly, I really like small high schools

and I'm a little fearful that if we just rushed to consolidate school districts we would suddenly lose that. ... The first step is, I think, really, consolidation of services at the regional level." Flanagan said he was referring mainly to noninstructional services, such as transportation or accounting.

Coulson's analyses were based on Census 2000 figures and five years of data from the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education on district size and spending, not including capital spending. The study controlled for at least six factors that could affect per-pupil spending in a given district: federal funding, state categorical funding, cost of labor, special education costs, public school enrollment as a share of district population, and racial composition of the student body. It also took into consideration "demand for education" by controlling for aggregate household income per capita. Previous studies have shown that higher-income families have higher expectations of schools, and some researchers theorize that school officials may spend more to meet those expectations.

Finally, the study discusses at length the question of whether public school officials, including administrators and school board members, ask for and spend as much money as possible, an outcome predicted by an economic theory known as "public choice," or whether they spend only as much as necessary to meet taxpayers' wishes. Either approach could affect per-pupil spending. For example, according to public choice theory, school board members who want political support from employee unions, or administrators who want to "grow" their programs, might push for larger budgets regardless of

public demand for services.

One way to measure this, Coulson says, is to determine the total household income in the district and divide that by public student enrollment. This measures the ease with which districts can raise per-pupil spending, because household income is the accepted measure of taxpayers' ability to pay. If the ease with which spending can be increased turns out to be a strong predictor of actual spending after controlling for other possible factors, then district officials are simply spending as much as they can, Coulson contends. This should be true despite Proposal A, he says, because districts that spent more before Proposal A still spend more today due to the "grandfathering" clause in the legislation.

The study found a strongly positive relationship between total household income per pupil and spending, Coulson reports. His findings, Coulson argues, "compellingly support public choice theory."

"In short, public schooling's incentive structure appears to encourage district officials to maximize their budgets. To improve the efficiency of Michigan's education system, this problematic incentive structure would have to be replaced with one in which school officials are instead rewarded for simultaneously controlling costs and maintaining or improving quality," the study continues.

Injecting more competition and parental choice into the system would be more likely to bring down costs than state-mandated mergers or breakups, the study says. The study is available online at www.mackinac.org/8530 or can be ordered from the Mackinac Center. ♦

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Lorie A. Shane
Managing Editor

Ryan S. Olson
Director of Education Policy

Daniel E. Montgomery
Graphic Designer

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

Districts report some success on teacher pay incentives

Grand Rapids payout likely; other districts still not certain

The majority of Grand Rapids Public Schools employees are expected to receive a cash payment this year because district enrollment declined less than anticipated. The district is one of a handful in Michigan that offered teachers and other employees a financial incentive for improved enrollment, improved academic performance or both. In at least two cases, the incentives will only be paid if state aid to schools does not drop below a set amount.

Grand Rapids Public Schools had projected an enrollment drop of 800 students in 2006-2007, based on previous declines, according to Fredericka Williams, executive director of human resources for the district. Employees were offered a payment equaling 0.25 percent of their salary if the district lost 600 to 699 students, and up to a 1.75 percent payment if the district lost 100 or fewer students. The payout applied to about 2,700 school employees.

District officials did not know the exact payout as of mid-March because audited enrollment numbers had not been determined, but an early estimate put it at \$300,000.

An entry-level teacher with a bachelor's degree in the Grand Rapids district earns a base salary of \$34,630, according to Williams, making the incentive worth between \$86 and \$606. A teacher at the top of the schedule, with a doctoral degree, earns \$63,820, making the incentive worth approximately \$160 to \$1,100.

"During negotiations, we had tried to find some way to work collaboratively," said Alex Chess, president of the Grand Rapids Education Association. "We basically came up with this together. It was a 'try it and see if it works,' if you will." Chess said there was more communication between teachers and parents during the year, with teachers encouraging parents to enroll their students.

In an article in *The Grand Rapids Press*, Grand Rapids Superintendent Bernard Taylor said staff members also canvassed neighborhoods last summer, introducing themselves to residents.

"All of us have a role in attracting and retaining students," Williams said.

Teachers had already received a 1.25 percent salary increase for 2006-2007. That contract expires June 30. Williams said she did not know if the incentive language would be proposed for the next contract.

BYRON CENTER INCREASES LINKED TO STATE AID, ENROLLMENT, ACADEMICS

Teachers in Byron Center Public Schools could receive up to a 1 percent increase in pay in each of the next three years if enrollment, financial and academic benchmarks are met each year. Financially, the district's fund balance must equal 12 percent of the operating budget and the per-pupil foundation allowance from the state must increase by at least \$210. Academically, five of the district's six buildings must receive an A on their Michigan School Report Cards and the district must make progress toward accreditation through the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Finally, district enrollment must increase by 100 students.

"It was an opportunity to say that if we're doing well as a system and if the economy was strong, we could give a little bit more," Superintendent Howard Napp said. There are approximately 190 teachers in the district; the incentive would cost the district a maximum of about \$100,000 a year. The incentives would be paid in 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, and would be in addition to a 2 percent salary schedule increase that teachers will receive in the final two years.

Dave Prindle, president of the Byron Center Education Association, said the

contract language reflects that "everybody shares the burden" of operating successful schools, including teachers, administrators and the state itself. "I wouldn't call them incentives. They're more indicators," he said of the benchmarks.

"Everybody has a role to play," he said, including teachers in academic achievement, administrators in fiscal responsibility and the state by decisions on school funding. "If it all comes together, parents will want to move into our district."

Five of the district's six buildings earned an A on the most recent Michigan School Report Cards, Prindle said, and Napp said the fund balance currently is at 15 percent of operating budget. In addition, the district added between 60 and 70 students this year, and Prindle said it is reasonable to expect it could add 100 next year. State funding, Prindle acknowledged, is more questionable.

"That's kind of just like spinning the wheel of fortune," he said.

All four indicators must be in place in order for teachers to receive the extra payment in the first two years of the contract, but in the third year they can earn partial payments based on how many of the benchmarks are met, Napp said.

Napp said the incentive offer "helps maintain a culture of high expectations. ... I really believe this is thinking out of the box." Napp's own contract with the district includes incentive clauses under which he can earn up to \$7,500 in additional pay for meeting specific benchmarks in areas like student academic performance, capital improvement projects and improvement in reading and writing instruction.

HOLLAND INCENTIVE BASED ON ENROLLMENT, AID

The salary schedule for the Holland Education Association could increase from 0.25 to 1 percent in the 2007-2008 school year, depending on enrollment and the per-pupil foundation grant. The increase is based on "blended" enrollment counts, which takes into account the fall enrollment and a second count done each February. Holland's most recent enrollment count was 4,525 students, according to Carol Minnaar, director of human resources.

Next year, if the blended count is at least 4,603 and the foundation grant is at least \$7,413, teachers would receive a 0.25 percent increase. Teachers could receive a higher incentive payment for higher enrollment — up to 1 percent if enrollment reaches 4,708. They also could receive an increase if enrollment does not increase, but the foundation grant does.

Holland also is paying a \$5,000 stipend to each teacher who earns certification through the National Board of Teaching.

FENNVILLE WAITING ON TEST SCORES

Fennville Education Association members approved a contract last year that would increase their salary schedule by 0.75 percent based primarily on district scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the new Michigan Merit Examination.

Superintendent Mark Dobias explained that the district computed an aggregate academic score for itself based on MEAP scores for grades 3 through 12 in 2005-2006, then compared that to an aggregate state score. The comparison showed Fennville was lower than the state by 10 percentage points. The district and teachers agreed that teachers would receive a retroactive payment equal to 0.75 percent of their salary if the district could cut the differential to 5 percent in 2006-2007.

"We aren't going to know the results for a while," Dobias said, because high school students didn't take the Merit Test until mid-March. State reports show that the district improved its scores on 15 of 24 MEAP tests

among third- through ninth-graders in 2006 compared to 2005.

"We didn't look at it so much as an incentive, (but) as a bonus for the hard work they had put in," Dobias said. "We have a great student body, but we have a very challenging population." Fennville has a high number of students for whom English is a second language and a high number of economically disadvantaged children, he said.

Dobias does know that the second half of the incentive program — which would have given teachers 0.75 percent increases if the district received \$250,000 in additional general fund revenue in 2006-2007 — will not be carried out this year.

"That wasn't so much an incentive as a sharing of any additional revenue," he said. When district enrollment dropped by 20 students this year, "it negated any possibility of making that."

The district will pay out about \$40,000 if the academic incentive is met, he said. There are about 93 teachers in the Fennville Education Association.

The contract between the association and the district expires this June, and Dobias said it's too early to say if the incentive clauses will be part of the negotiations for a new contract.

"I happen to believe in it. I think it's a good thing," he said.

Howell schools aren't alone in debate over values in the classroom

An angry young student stood up before a crowd in the Flint Public Library this spring to say that she, for one, has heard enough bad news about her school district.

"We get all the crap. We're always in the news for the negative stuff," she said heatedly. She was referring to Howell Public Schools, the Livingston County district that has earned state and, at times, national headlines in the past two years for vocal community debates on the content of books, a diversity flag and even school music policies. What this high school student might not know is that Howell is not alone. School districts across the country are doing battle over religious expression in schools, content of books, teaching of evolution and more, according to a 2007 study by the Cato Institute, a nonprofit public policy research institute headquartered in Washington, D.C.

At the same time, the district is in a heated battle with its own teachers over health insurance, another case in which it is not alone. Districts across Michigan report this spring that health insurance benefits are the major stumbling block to signing teacher contracts.

"Why We Fight: How Public Schools Cause Social Conflict," published by the Cato Institute in January, documents almost 150 cases in the 2005-2006 school year across the country in which people of different backgrounds and beliefs were at odds over what and how local public schools should teach students.

That comes as no surprise to Vicky Fyke, a Howell resident who is head of the Livingston Organization for Values in Education. LOVE made headlines when its members attempted to have several books removed from the Howell High School curriculum because of sexual content and profanity.

"People started emailing us from all over the United States," Fyke said. "Kansas, Texas, Georgia, South Carolina. People are going through the same kinds of things we were. It's nice to know you're not alone in your fight."

BOOKS, DIVERSITY FLAG AMONG CONTROVERSIES

The fight in Howell has been a long and complicated one, but two issues that have created ongoing controversy involve the hanging of a rainbow flag in Howell High School and the use of several books in high school English classes that Fyke and the LOVE organization say contain profanity

MERIT PAY STUDIES UNDER WAY

A number of institutions across the country are testing the idea of paying teachers on the basis of their students' academic achievement.

In Arkansas, the Achievement Challenge Pilot Project (ACPP) is a merit pay plan that bases awards solely on student achievement gains. Operating in the Little Rock Public Schools, ACPP began with one school in 2004-2005, added a second school in 2005-2006, and added three more schools in 2006. In the fall of 2006, researchers from the University of Arkansas released their first report on the impacts of this program.

They found that students in participating schools improved by 7 percentile points on average on the standardized test score measure of interest, according to Marc Holley, a doctoral fellow at the university. The research methodology essentially compared an individual student's score on a nationally normed standardized test taken at the beginning of the year to that student's performance at the end of the year. Teachers earned rewards based on the magnitude of their students' gains and on the number of students who demonstrated improvement. Individual awards could exceed \$8,000, and teachers in both schools earned more than \$200,000 total. ♦

and graphic sexuality.

The rainbow flag was put up by the school's Diversity Club, but has since been taken down. Members of Fyke's organization say it is a recognized symbol of support for gay rights. The books, "The Freedom Writers' Diary," a collection of essays by Los Angeles high school students; "The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison; and "Black Boy" by Richard Wright, were approved by the district's curriculum council for use in high school classes. LOVE attracted statewide attention when it asked legal authorities to determine if the books violate obscenity laws. Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox said the debate is a matter for the local prosecutor, and the county prosecuting attorney, David Morse, said no laws have been broken by use of the books. The books do not violate obscenity law, according to a review by the Detroit offices of the FBI and the U.S. Attorney.

The rulings don't change Fyke's opinion

Comment on this article at
<http://forum.educationreport.org>

that the books don't belong in high school English classes. "Basically, I guess the door is open for any of that kind of material," she said.

Howell residents also have been divided in recent years on the content of sex education instruction, a proposed elective course on the Bible and on a policy controlling the amount of Christian music allowed at school concerts. Heated arguments over district issues take place regularly in online blogs and in the online comment forum sponsored by the local newspaper, the Daily Press & Argus.

SOME CONFLICTS INSOLUBLE, AUTHOR SAYS

The Cato study found eight common categories of argument in public schools across the country: intelligent design, freedom of expression, book banning, multiculturalism, mandated integration, sex education, treatment of homosexuality and religion.

In some cases, the values that people hold on these subjects are so diverse that they cannot coexist peacefully in a single school system, said study author Neal McCluskey, a policy analyst with the Cato Institute's Center

ADVERTISING FOR STUDENTS



“We’re not a monopoly any more. Competition is intense.”

Both Detroit Public Schools and the Michigan Association for Public School Academies use television advertising to promote their programs. One DPS campaign features student chefs, dancers and mechanics, as well as the student shown here in a science program. More recent DPS ads show district graduate Michael Roberts, above left, now a financial planner. MAPSA television spots include former Detroit Lions wide receiver Freddie Scott, above right, who says, “As parents in Michigan, we all have a right to choose.”

SCHOOLS USE RADIO, TV, BILLBOARDS TO LURE ‘CUSTOMERS’

Michael Barlow has been told by the professionals that he has a knack for writing radio spots. Like the one that begins “Parents: Discover one of the best-kept secrets in Oakland County. It has lots of new, affordable housing and it’s in a jewel of a district called the Hazel Park Schools.”

Radio ads like that one, plus Hazel Park Schools’ direct mailings, newspaper advertisements, flyers and brochures, may be among the reasons the district has brought in more students through schools of choice than it has lost, although it’s difficult to assess, Barlow said.

But even though Barlow believes the advertising gets results, he doesn’t particularly like having to do it. Schools-of-choice agreements and competition from charter and independent schools have forced Hazel Park and other districts into advertising campaigns, he said. Barlow would prefer to spend that time in his main role as director of curriculum for the school district.

“It has caused districts to devote a portion of their revenue to competing with each other,” Barlow said. “I’m in favor of competition ... but schools might be better suited to be focusing on improv-

ing academic achievement.”

Other administrators in competitive areas like southeast Michigan also have turned to advertising as a way to attract students — and the state aid that follows.

“We’re not a monopoly any more. Competition is intense,” said Lekan Oguntoyinbo, spokesman for Detroit Public Schools. “There are all kinds of options out there now. To keep our customer base, we have to be out there delivering our message unfiltered.”

“Customer base,” “market share” and “zone advertising” are not familiar

— or comfortable — terms to many school officials, an advertising consultant told Michigan Education Report.

“You’re selling education, and that’s difficult for educators to deal with. It’s not how they’re trained to think,” said Robert Kolt, president and CEO of Kolt Communications, an Okemos-based company that has worked on occasion with school districts. Kolt also teaches advertising at Michigan State University. “Colleges have always marketed themselves, but to K-12 it seems uncomfortable.”

Radio, television and newspaper ads, plus fliers and brochures, are some of the tools schools are using to promote themselves. Highland Park Schools went a step further in the summer of 2006 when it sponsored a “mobile enrollment” campaign by sending a motor coach sport-

UTAH VOUCHERS

continued from Page One

education-related organizations, including teacher and other school employee unions, principal and administrator associations, the Utah PTA, the Utah School Employees Association and also the NAACP. The group claims that the Choice in Education Act was passed by the Utah Legislature with little opportunity for public input.

The group’s Web site also says the voucher plan is too expensive and that vouchers have not been proven to improve student achievement. “Voters should decide whether or not to move forward on the voucher proposal. Our petition will place the subject on the ballot in the form of a referendum. We will be asking Utah citizens to vote “Yes!” to public schools and “Yes!” to overturning the voucher law,” the Web site says. As of late April, the group said it believed it had collected enough signatures to force a referendum.

The school choice effort was led by Parents for Choice in Education, based in Salt Lake City. Utah Gov. John Huntsman Jr. signed the bill into law in February, after it passed by one vote in the Utah House of Representatives, 38-37, earlier that month.

School choice groups immediately praised the bill as one of the most far-reaching and significant of its kind.

“The victory last night proves that in the end freedom always trumps fear,” said Robert C. Enlow, executive director and COO of the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, shortly after the governor’s signing.

While other states have school choice programs, most are aimed at specific groups, such as low-income families,

special needs students or students in failing schools. In Arizona, for example, the state pays for scholarships for foster children and disabled children to attend the schools of the families’ choosing, public or private.

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The Parents for Choice group is now mounting a second campaign, this one aimed at countering the referendum. Even if the matter does go to a statewide vote, “we believe we will win the election on the merits of the issue,” spokeswoman Nancy Pomeroy told The Salt Lake Tribune in late April.

Utahns for Public Schools argues that most vouchers would go to families who would have chosen private schools anyway, so the plan will not save money for public schools or ease overcrowding.

Parents for Choice and Utahns for Public Schools disagree over the financial impact the voucher plan will have on the state’s budget. Money for the vouchers will come from Utah’s general fund, not from its Uniform School Fund or from local property taxes. Estimates are that the average voucher will be \$2,000; the state has set aside \$9.2 million for the program apart from the \$3.5 billion appropriated for public school education for 2007-2008. Since the state spends an average \$7,500 per child in public schools now, it would save money on every child who uses a voucher, the Choice group explains. ♦



Listen to an interview with Elisa Clements at www.EducationReport.org/8494

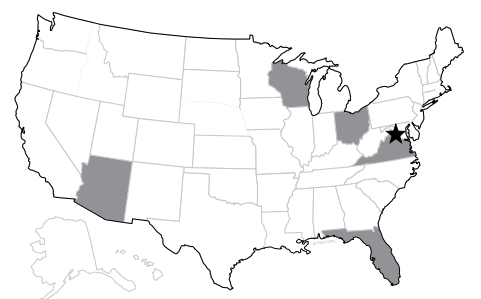
School vouchers in the news

Cleveland, Ohio – The Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program provides grants to children living in Cleveland Municipal School District to attend registered private or out-of-district public schools. For low-income children, the scholarship covers up to 90 percent of tuition costs. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Cleveland program in a case in 2002.

Columbus, Ohio – In March of 2007, Gov. Ted Strickland removed the Ohio state voucher program, called EdChoice, from his proposed budget. Established in 2006, the program provides scholarships to students in underperforming public schools to attend private schools. Nearly 3,000 children received scholarships the first year.

Arizona – The Arizona Supreme Court in January declined to hear a legal challenge against the state’s voucher programs for foster children and special-needs children. The programs provide state-funded scholarships for these children to attend the schools of their families’ choice, public or private. Challengers are expected to try again in the lower courts.

Florida – Florida’s A+ Opportunity Scholarship program allowed students who attend or are assigned to a Florida school that has consistently received a failing grade to transfer to a better public or private school. The private component of the program was held unconstitutional by the Florida



Supreme Court in January 2006. Children in that program were made eligible for the state’s corporate tax credit scholarship program.

Washington, D.C. – The first federally funded school choice initiative, the Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program provides low-income students with scholarships to attend the school that best meets their educational needs. Priority is given to students who attend schools deemed in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Milwaukee, Wis. – The nation’s longest running school choice program, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, provides scholarships for low-income children to attend the private school that best meets their educational needs. During the 2006-2007 school year 17,951 students attended 124 participating private schools through MPCCP.

(In addition to voucher programs, a number of states have adopted programs allowing tax credits for personal or corporate contributions to scholarship programs, including scholarships given to children to attend private schools. Sources: Alliance for School Choice, media reports.)

ing a school banner to various parks and playgrounds throughout the Detroit area, offering enrollment information. Earlier this year, the district paid for billboard space one block outside its own boundaries, inside the Detroit Public Schools district.

"It's an investment. We regard it as that," school spokesman Greg Byndrian

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said of the district's \$93,000 marketing budget. "You don't have to attract very many students to recoup that."

Since school districts receive about \$7,000 per student in state aid, attracting a dozen students would pay for the advertising in Highland Park. The Hazel Park School District's annual marketing budget is about \$48,000, according to Barlow, while Detroit Public Schools allocates \$500,000 a year, Oguntoyinbo said.

"The marketing campaign is all-encompassing," Oguntoyinbo said. "It's not just advertising. It's brochures. It's community outreach. Last year we threw in another component — customer service."

The customer service money was spent on training staff in customer service skills, since the front office workers in any given school are often the ones who make the largest impression on parents, he said.

Kolt said that advertising should be viewed as just one tool in a larger public relations effort.

"Sometimes the most important thing is not to invest in advertising, but just to communicate with parents."

One of the effects of spending money on public relations is that it forces schools to "disclose and defend what they do," Kolt said. "Nothing sells itself, and educational institutions realize they need to promote their own programs."

Promote is the key word. Most school districts say they limit their advertisements to pointing out their own strengths, not other schools' weaknesses. Portage Public Schools, for example, has more than doubled the amount it spends on "image" advertising in local Chamber of Commerce and realty publications.

The increase, from \$1,000 to \$2,450, is in response to the Kalamazoo Promise, offered in neighboring Kalamazoo Public Schools, according to Tom Vance, community relations manager for the Portage school district. Funded by anonymous donors, the Promise offers free college tuition to Kalamazoo Public Schools graduates who meet certain criteria. The Portage district supports the Promise as a way of strengthening the community overall, Vance told Michigan Education Report, but at least 50 students have shifted from Portage to Kalamazoo to take advantage of the offer. Most of those students already lived in the Kalamazoo district, but were attending Portage schools, according to Vance.

Portage also buys a weekly full-page advertisement in the Portage Gazette during the school year, which it uses to promote news and feature stories about the district. The cost is \$21,000 annually, down from \$40,000 a few years ago when the district purchased the space year-round.

"Overall our communications spending has gone down over the past few years, although we've adjusted some methods and targeting," Vance wrote in an E-mail to



School districts across the state, and nationwide, are using conventional means of advertising to help spread the word and attract students to their services.

MER. "Our main strategy for maintaining and recruiting students is to tell our story of academic excellence, since we're in the top 6 percent of high-achieving districts in Michigan."

In Hazel Park, Barlow said he focuses the advertising on things like the district's free all-day kindergarten, free athletic programs and being a "hometown, caring district." He also has made appeals to the area's ethnic communities by putting up posters written in Chinese, Arabic, Spanish and Korean in area restaurants and churches. To the south, Highland Park capitalizes on its Career Academy, which offers a wide variety of career and technical programs.

"That's certainly been a very big draw for us," Byndrian said. Enrollment figures show that nearly 1,600 students who are assigned to the Detroit Public Schools district attend schools in Highland Park. "We don't engage in bashing others," he said. "We stress the positive."

Media buys are not for every school, however. Dr. Stephen Evans, superintendent at the Pontiac Academy for Excellence, a charter public school, says that he believes radio and television advertising would be "a big waste of time." But his school does send fliers and brochures to households within a five-mile radius, prints promotional posters in English and Spanish, and asks every vendor that visits the school to walk away with literature to distribute. Evans also personally visits local Head Start programs to tell them about the charter school. Still, "I think the biggest thing that has brought students here is the quality program."

The Academy is located in the lowest socioeconomic neighborhood in the city. Community resources are limited, he said, so he focuses on "the kind of program that would facilitate inner-city needs," like before- and after-school activities and a Reading Recovery program. Parents are invited to become involved in technology classes.

"Word of mouth has been the biggest thing," Evans said. The Academy's enrollment has grown from an initial 25 students in the year 2000 to 1,150 this year. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Pontiac ranks

fourth in the country for market share captured by charter schools. While about 5 percent of Michigan students overall attend charter schools, in the Pontiac area the number is 20 percent, based on 2005-2006 enrollment.

Farther north in Michigan, the manager of one outdoor advertising firm says he has not seen an increase in K-12 school advertising on billboards.

"We've had it for years around here," said Doug Elchuk, vice president and general manager of the Saginaw office of Lamar Advertising. His office serves 23 counties in the middle of the state. Some school districts in his region do buy billboard space, typically to congratulate students for achievements in sports or extracurricular activities, he said. Lamar itself donates free space to school districts at times as a public service.

"School districts are like anybody else," he said. "If they can do things that make them look good, they will."

Rather than putting advertisements in front of them, parents would be better served if all schools — private, public and charter — focused on providing quality programs and on making it easier for parents to obtain information and compare schools, said Dan Quisenberry, executive director of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies.

"The first step is to put together a good program."

Dan Quisenberry
Michigan Association of Public School Academies

"We as a society need to get better information to parents," he said. "What we have found is that parents want a quality school. They want to know what you are doing and how."

To that end, MAPSA and the charter school community developed a Web site where parents can look up information about charter, private, parochial and conventional public schools, at www.school4me.org. "If parents are well-informed and know how to pick schools, our (charter) schools will do just fine."

Quisenberry also says that not all districts take the positive-only approach to

advertising. Detroit Public Schools sponsored radio and television ads in recent years centered on the theme "Come Home to Detroit Public Schools," which, he said, made misleading claims that charter schools do not serve special education students and do not hire certified teachers.

"Charter schools make a lot of promises, but they don't deliver. Many of their teachers aren't certified," one television ad said. Developed in 2005-2006, the ad can still be viewed at the Detroit Public Schools Web site. Despite that ad and others, Quisenberry pointed out, DPS enrollment continues to decline while charter enrollment in Wayne County has increased.

"Bashing everybody else is not going to work," he said. "The first step is to put together a good program. Parents, by word of mouth, will find out about it."

The most recent DPS television advertisements do not remark on charter schools. Most feature graduate Michael Roberts, a financial planner who says, "Detroit Public Schools prepared me for everything. Come home to Detroit Public Schools." Radio spots encourage students to stay in school and graduate.

Asked about the change in focus, Oguntoyinbo said, "I don't know that there was a specific reason. We decided that perhaps it was more important to advertise certain things." The district is trying to sell parents on the wide variety of academic and career programs that Detroit offers, he said, like programs in culinary arts, robotics and aerospace.

When he gets complaints about the money spent on marketing, Oguntoyinbo said he responds, "Look. Everyone's advertising. Inkster. Highland Park. Oak Park has a lot of our kids. We don't have the luxury to sit on our hands."

In Hazel Park, Barlow agreed. "We are a cash-strapped district. ... Our finances are tied directly to the number of students we have. We would be derelict if we didn't get in there and compete." ♦

(To view the Michigan Association of Public School Academies' television advertisements about school choice, go to www.school4me.org/pages/spot1.cfm. To view a variety of Detroit Public Schools radio and television advertisements, go to www.detroit.k12.mi.us/comehome.html.)

SCHOOL IN FOCUS

Trinitas Classical School: New school, classic approach

Eyes on the teacher, hands at the ready, the young students take a deep breath and begin to chant: "... Action verbs are fun to do. Now, it's time to name a few. So, clap your hands and join our rhyme; Say those verbs in record time!"

"Faster!" the first- and second-graders beg teacher Susan Mehari minutes later, after completing their repertoire of jingles about verbs, adverbs and adjectives. There is an educational theory behind this chanting, and while that theory might mean little to the enthusiastic students at this point, it means a great deal to the parents who have chosen to send their children here.

Trinitas Classical School is a private, "intentionally ecumenical" Christian school in Grand Rapids. Now in its first year, the school was organized in just over a four-month period by a group of about 10 families who were determined to see their children educated in the classical method and in a joyful and creative environment, according to curriculum committee member Anne Poortenga.

Between late April and August of 2006, the group chose a curriculum, found classroom space in a northeast Grand Rapids church, hired four teachers, including one headmaster, established a Web site, planned the school budget and opened for the year with 95 percent of the needed funding in place. Enrollment stands at 27; tuition is \$5,000 per child for first- through eighth-graders and \$3,000 for kindergarteners.

"We've been blessed with a group of people who are passionate and who are fully involved," said Rob Lough, secretary of the school's board of trustees. "We need to continue that level of involvement and grow the core group." Next on the parents' agenda is to find a permanent facility and market the school to more families.

Trinitas is swimming against the stream of Michigan's private education market. According to figures from the Michigan Department of Education, there were 896 nonpublic schools in the state in 2005-2006, down 17 percent over the past 15 years. The number of students enrolled in nonpublic schools declined by 12 percent during the same time period. Nationally, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were nearly 900 fewer private schools in the country in 2003 than in 2001, although

the number of private school students as a percent of all students remained steady at 10 percent.

"There's no question the Michigan economy is hurting every school in the state," said Glen Walstra, executive director of the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools. MANS advocates and provides services for faith-based schools, including Catholic schools of the seven dioceses of Michigan, the Michigan region of Christian Schools International, and the Michigan District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Schools.

Many of those systems have closed schools in recent years, consolidating programs in fewer buildings. In the Detroit area alone, 39 Catholic schools have closed since 2002. In some cases the population has shifted to the suburbs, Walstra said, and in other cases parents have moved their children to free charter schools or to other public districts through schools-of-choice programs.

"Almost anybody who's been interested in opening a school in the last 10 years has looked at the charter school route," said Richard C. Halsey, executive director of the Association of Independent Michigan Schools, a diverse group of schools ranging in size, location and educational methods. The number of schools in his association dropped from 30 to 27 recently, due to two closings and one merger. "The schools that have had the most difficulty are ones with the lowest tuition," he said.

Faith-based schools always will have core groups of parents willing to pay tuition for an education that rests on family, school and church, Walstra said. "That's the three-legged stool, and those families won't leave unless they're backed against a wall." But parents may have to take a larger role in marketing their schools, and schools may have to adopt new approaches to the market, he said.

"The schools that are really successful are finding a niche project," he said, like virtual learning or programs for special needs students.

At Trinitas, a significant part of the appeal is classical education, a system of learning based on the Trivium, which is a Latin word for "the three ways." In classical schools, children are guided through three phases of education – the grammar stage, focused on absorbing facts and figures; the logic stage, focused on analyzing that knowledge for truth; and the rhetoric stage, focused on eloquently expressing and seeking out truth on higher levels. Or, as Trinitas school literature describes the stages – "discovering, discerning and desiring truth."

The stages are meant to take advantage of a child's natural development, headmaster Peter



Stephen Sorensen investigates arc and distance as part of a science experiment using model catapults.



Sam Poortenga finishes his Latin studies for the day. Latin language and grammar are part of the Trinitas daily curriculum.

Marth explained. Young children are curious and have a great capacity to take in and recall large amounts of information in all subject areas, particularly with the help of stories, chants and songs. As they grow, students develop the ability for abstract thought, which allows them not just to remember information, but to analyze it, identifying cause and effect in science and comparing and contrasting ideas in such subjects as history and literature. So while younger students might read about the U.S. Constitution and the history surrounding it, he said, fifth-graders would more likely read and analyze the document itself and high-school students would develop and write arguments concerning it.

"Classical education is structured around the natural abilities of the child at every age," Marth said. "We don't believe that excellence in education is antithetical to a joy-filled school environment."

In addition to typical subjects like math, science, English and history, Trinitas students study Latin and logic, and participate in fine arts and physical education classes. The science program is inquiry-based, meaning there is an emphasis on discovering scientific truths through hands-on activities. Reading selections draw heavily on classical sources, which Marth describes as "works worthy of admiration and imitation from every time and place," from Aesop to Augustine to Beatrix Potter. "We want our children to read well and to be well-read."

Classical schools also teach that there are objective standards of purity, nobility and beauty against which ideas and actions should be measured, Marth said. As graduates, students should be critical thinkers, Poortenga added, having learned that "there are better and worse ways to discuss and dialogue and come to a conclusion."

As an intentionally ecumenical Christian school, Trinitas' schedule includes daily worship and a Bible curriculum that focuses on commonalities among Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Christian beliefs, the leaders said.

The school also partners with home-school parents who want to use classical education curriculum and methods. The school provides lesson plans for some subjects and the home-school students are invited to visit the school twice a week for Latin and other classes, as well as join in extracurricular activities. Right now there are four such partners, but school officials expect the number to grow.

Home-school students are the great unknown in the private school market, according to federal education officials. While the number of institutional private schools and students may be declining, the total number of students educated outside the public school system may not.

Home-school enrollment is increasing nationwide, "not only among conservative Christians but among a lot of people who are thoroughly secular," according to Jack Klenk, director of the Office of Non-Public Education in the U.S. Department of Education. Exact figures are hard to determine, but advocacy groups put the number at approximately two

million children.

Klenk said the growing support for home-school programs, growing availability of public school choice programs and cost of private school tuition all have put pressure on private school enrollment.

"If you remove the economic barrier, then all these trends change immediately," he said, pointing to Washington, D.C. as an example. The D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, established by Congress as the nation's first federally funded voucher program in 2004, offers up to \$7,500 in tuition to low-income students who are admitted to religious and private schools. Of the 1,800 students now receiving scholarships, about 1,000 chose to attend Catholic schools, Klenk said.

The Bush administration is proposing to broaden the Opportunity Scholarship program and add a Promise Scholarship program to the No Child Left Behind Act, up for reauthorization this year. Promise Scholarships would require public schools that go into restructuring status to offer private school choice, intensive tutoring or inter-district public school choice to low-income students. Federal funds would follow the child to his or her new school, supplemented by a federal scholarship of \$2,500. The Opportunity Scholarship program would support local efforts to enable students to attend a private school through a locally designed scholarship program.

"Certainly the president and this administration have embraced the federal role" in supporting choice in education, said Morgan Brown, assistant deputy secretary for Innovation and Improvement in the Department of Education. "We believe parents have a right to choose." However, the bulk of education funding is at the state level, he pointed out.

Brown's office also is encouraging private schools to become Supplemental Education Service providers under the terms of No Child Left Behind, which requires low-performing schools to offer extra academic help or tutoring to low-income students. Some private schools already have demonstrated the ability to raise achievement among low-income students, he said, and by becoming SES providers they could receive federal education funds to use those successful techniques with more students.

In addition to helping students from low-performing schools, private schools also play a role in nurturing a wide variety of educational methods, Halsey pointed out. Michigan's Association of Independent Schools counts as members schools that use a traditional college-preparatory approach, the Waldorf method, Montessori method, a parent-cooperative system and more.

"Independent schools have been at the forefront of curricular innovation in many ways, and many times they have been at the rear," he said. "We've often been leaders in promoting ideas." ♦



Top: Third- and fourth-graders answer questions about the items they'll need for a project on electricity and magnets.



Bottom: Art is part of the regular curriculum at Trinitas Classical School. Here, Kate Poortenga and Claire Seven try their hand at watercolors.



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DETROIT CHARTERS

continued from Page One

Detroit Public Schools choose instead to attend private, charter or conventional public schools in neighboring districts, taking with them millions of dollars in state funding. The Detroit Board of Education voted this spring to close 34 elementary schools next year and more in the following year if the schools do not meet academic or enrollment goals.

While Kilpatrick's comments are "a step in the right direction for parents and students of Detroit," the state's universities won't be able to respond unless the current cap on charter schools is lifted, pointed out Ed Richardson, director of the charter school office at Grand Valley State University. Michigan law limits the number of charter schools that public state universities can authorize to 150 combined, although the state also passed a law in 2003 providing for 15 new charter high schools in Detroit to accommodate Thompson's offer.

Demand is heavy for university authorizations, according to Richardson and James Goenner, executive director of Central Michigan University's Center for Charter Schools.

Two GVSU-authorized schools are closing, and more than 20 organizations have applied for those charters, Richardson told Michigan Education Report.

"We have roughly 50 groups that are interested in starting charter schools, but most of them are waiting on the sidelines because when there are no charters available, you really have to look yourself in the face and wonder why go

through the effort," Goenner told the Detroit News earlier this year.

In a pledge they took during Kilpatrick's visit, the University Prep ninth-graders said they would become involved in changing the future of Detroit by graduating from high school and going to college or pursuing other postsecondary studies. They also have invited other ninth-graders in Detroit Public Schools and charter public schools throughout the city to join the challenge.

University Prep operates under the terms of a "90/90" requirement set by Thompson, a Plymouth resident who, with his wife, Ellen, donated \$15 million for the campus near downtown Detroit. He leases the buildings to University Prep for \$1 a year. In exchange for his financial support, the school must have a graduation rate of 90 percent and at least 90 percent of each graduating class must attend college.

"My guess is we'll end up somewhere between a 93- and 95-percent graduation rate," Ross said. Each student in the school's first graduating class already has been accepted at a college or technical school, but they must follow through and actually attend classes to fulfill the second half of the 90/90 requirement, he said. A third requirement — that the class have a median score of 18 on the ACT test — has been met.

"If you're going to keep 90 percent of your kids in school, you need to deal with issues of identity and aspirations," he said. Many students "decide too young that they aren't winners at the school game." He said large urban school systems like Detroit have a strategy for teaching academics, but "no strategy for building identity. ...

The issue is that the mass production system used by traditional public schools is obsolete."

Ross said he favors small high schools where teachers and administrators can get to know students personally. At University Prep, students are assigned to an "advisory," or learning community, in groups of about 16, staying with that group and the same adult adviser for two to four years. According to a report in the Detroit News, Ross and others recommended the mayor create 50 such schools in the city, if not through Detroit Public Schools then by other measures.

A second University Prep system, also chartered by Grand Valley State University and with financial backing by Thompson, is scheduled to begin operations in the fall of 2008. University Preparatory Science and Math Academy will open with a middle school only, just as University Prep did with 112 sixth-graders in 2000, later adding a high school and then, potentially, elementary schools, Ross said. Richardson said the school will be the first opened under the 2003 law providing for new urban high schools in Detroit.

The superintendent of the new school will be Margaret Trimer-Hartley, previously the spokeswoman for the Michigan Education Association school employees union. Trimer-Hartley declined to discuss the move with Michigan Education Report, but Ross acknowledged that "you could certainly say it's a little ironic."

The MEA is a longtime critic of charter schools and has advocated heavy regulation of charter operations and caps on the number of schools. Most recently, the union lost a court battle over Bay

Mills Community College, an American Indian tribal college in the Upper Peninsula that charters more than 30 schools. The MEA had argued that, because the Bay Mills board of governors is not publicly elected, but appointed by tribal members, the schools it charters are not public and are therefore ineligible to receive public funds. The Michigan Court of Appeals dismissed the suit.

Ross said he met Trimer-Hartley through her work with "Your Child: The Coalition," which describes itself as a nonprofit coalition of Michigan-based education and family organizations that studies education issues.

The scene in Detroit is an example of demand for quality driving growth, said Stephanie Van Koevering, executive director of the Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers. The council is an organization of 11 of the 26 entities that authorize charter public schools in Michigan, and collectively represent 90 percent of the student population in charter schools.

A survey of Michigan residents sponsored by the council this spring showed that 56 percent of respondents either strongly favor or somewhat favor charter schools, while 23 percent either strongly or somewhat oppose charters.

"As people learn more about charters and how they're overseen, they tend to be more supportive," Van Koevering said. Parent demand may be the force that ultimately lifts the cap on the number of charter schools that Michigan

public universities can authorize, she said.

Under Michigan law, a charter school may be authorized by a local or intermediate school district, community college board, tribally controlled community college board, or state public university. The bulk of charter schools are authorized by state universities and by Bay Mills. In all, there currently are 229 charter schools in operation in Michigan; many report student waiting lists.

"The fact that there is a cap doesn't leave room for low performers," Van Koevering said. Some 20 charter schools have closed in the past 20 years and a handful more closures are expected. Lakeshore Public Academy near Muskegon, for example, will close at the end of this year due to low test scores and declining enrollment. The MCCSA doesn't see that as a weakness, but a strength.

"That's accountability in action," Van Koevering said. "That's not something you see happening in the conventional K-12 community."

In addition to focusing on quality control at its members' schools, the MCCSA also is building a body of research about what works well in charter schools and making those techniques known to the education community. One of the original policy goals behind charter schools was to bring innovation to Michigan education, she said.

"That's what the charter system has accomplished. Only through competition can we improve." ♦

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Bullying policies

A pair of bills approved in the Michigan House would require school districts, including conventional districts and charter schools, to adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying, while at the same time requiring the Department of Education to disseminate a model policy along those lines. A similar bill has been proposed in the Senate. House Bill 4162, introduced by Rep. Pam Byrnes, D-Lyndon Township, would require schools to adopt a policy within six months and submit a copy to the Department of Education within 30 days after local approval. This bill encourages districts to adopt the definition of bullying from a model anti-bullying policy adopted by the state board of education on Sept. 12, 2006, which contains references to an individual's race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression; or a mental, physical, sensory disability or impairment, or by any other distinguishing characteristic. The bill would cover any actions on school premises or school buses, as well as at school-sponsored events off school premises. It also would cover cases off school premises that involve use of school-owned or school-controlled telecommunications access devices or service providers. Schools would be "strongly encouraged" to adopt the model policy under HB 4091, originally introduced by Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi, D-Farmington Hills, on January 23, and would be advised to work with local law enforcement and parents to implement the policy. House Bill 4091 and 4162 passed in the House, 66-43 and 59-50, respectively, on March 28. Senate Bill 107 was introduced by Sen. Glenn Anderson, D-Westland, on Jan. 30, which would require schools to adopt a policy

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

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prohibiting harassment, intimidation, or bullying; and to require the Department of Education to develop a model policy. The bill also requires schools to train staff in the policy they adopt. It was referred to the Senate Education Committee on Jan. 30.

www.michiganvotes.org/2007-HB-4091
www.michiganvotes.org/2007-HB-4162

Unions could bargain over privatization

A law that would allow school privatization to be an issue at the bargaining table was introduced by Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, on March 27. House Bill 4533 would repeal a law that now allows school districts freely to seek competitive bids for noninstructional services without bargaining with school employee unions. The law would apply in such cases as when a union seeks to include a provision in a school district's contract with employees that bans the district from competitively contracting for bus, janitorial or food services. The bill was referred to the House Labor Committee on March 27.

www.michiganvotes.org/2007-HB-4533

Revising special education cross-district enrollment

Special education students would find it easier to attend programs in a neighboring intermediate school district under the terms of House Bill 4529, introduced by Rep. Fran Amos, R-Waterford, on March 22. The bill would eliminate an existing requirement that a contiguous intermediate school district

must have a written agreement with a special education pupil's district or intermediate district of residence in order for that student to be enrolled in the neighboring intermediate district and for the neighboring district to get the state school aid payments tied to the student. The bill was referred to the House Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2007-HB-4529

Change name of 'sinking funds'

Introduced by Sen. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, on March 21, Senate Bill 367 would allow schools to call sinking funds 'infrastructure investment funds' in the ballot language of property tax millage increase requests. The bill would not expand the allowable uses of sinking fund revenue, or raise the current cap of five mills for these property tax levies. The bill was referred to the Senate Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2007-SB-367

Ban censorship of student publications

Public school officials would be prohibited from imposing prior restraint (censorship) on a student publication under Senate Bill 352, introduced by Sen. Michael Switalski, D-Roseville, on March 15. Exceptions would be allowed if the content were obscene, defamatory, constituted advertising for a product illegal for minors, or represented a clear and present danger (based on specific facts) of an unlawful act or a school disruption. The bill also would require schools to appoint a faculty advisor to student publications, prohibit disciplining a faculty

advisor for refusing to censor, and provide civil immunity to school board members, administrators, and faculty advisors for any expression made by a student in the publication. The bill was referred to the Senate Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2007-SB-352

Spending for school anti-violence programs

Introduced by Rep. Andy Meisner, D-Ferndale, on March 8, House Bill 4439 would appropriate \$1.5 million for competitive grants to schools to pay for public safety officers and mental health professionals. Those officials would be tasked with recognizing warning signs and risk factors and preventing school violence and bullying. The bill was referred to the House Appropriations Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2007-HB-4439

Mandatory dental exams

Parents would have to prove that their children had a dental exam after the age of 3 but before entering kindergarten if the Legislature adopts a proposal introduced by Rep. Brenda Clack, D-Flint, on Jan. 30. Children would be prohibited from starting kindergarten unless the parent provided proof of the exam in the form of a certificate from a licensed dentist. Parents also would have the option of signing a statement saying they received information about the importance of dental examinations, but opted against one for their child. The proposal, HB 4165, would apply to public and nonpublic school students. The House Education Committee referred the bill to the House Health Policy Committee on March 6.

www.michiganvotes.org/2007-HB-4165

HOWELL SCHOOLS

continued from Page Three

for Educational Freedom. "They're inherently in conflict and can never be otherwise."

Either the fighting continues indefinitely—in school or in court—or the opponents compromise on a watered-down version of instruction, he said.

"Sometimes you do get that compromise and you get these textbooks that don't teach anything, and so neither side wins," he said. McCluskey thinks a better solution would be to offer more choices in education, so that parents can send their child to a school that shares their moral and educational goals without having to pay taxes for a school that does not. The idea that public education brings together children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse values, and molds them into a unified citizenry is a myth, McCluskey asserts in his report. Rather, public education "often forces people of disparate backgrounds and beliefs into political combat."

In one 19th century case cited in his report, Catholics and Protestants disagreed over which version of the Bible to use in Philadelphia public schools. The argument spilled over into violent clashes in the streets and ultimately led to a declaration of martial law. McCluskey writes that the feud subsided mainly because Catholics opened their own, separate schools and because other issues, including the Civil War, pushed the matter to the background.

McCluskey's report points out conflict in other Michigan districts as well, among them divided opinion about content of sex education curricula, teaching of intelligent design, use of the term "Americans" and allowing single-sex schools. Since the 150 cases noted in his analysis are drawn from news accounts, it's likely there are even more that go unreported in smaller schools that do not draw media attention, he said.

HOWELL HISTORY A FACTOR

Charges of racism come up frequently in the debate in Howell. The community was in the media in 2005 when a local store owner held an auction—attended by shoppers as well as protesters—of Ku Klux Klan memorabilia. The following year there was another showing of memorabilia, this time a traveling exhibit called "Hateful Things," which was part of a diversity awareness program. There is a history of KKK activity in Livingston County, according to published accounts. Robert Miles, a former Klan Grand Dragon, lived in Cohoctah Township, north of Howell, where he burned crosses and held KKK rallies. He died in 1992.

Opponents of the LOVE organization say it promotes intolerant ideas and represents only a minority of residents in the community. A group of Howell students and teachers traveled to Flint last spring to hear a presentation by Erin Gruwell, the former Los Angeles teacher whose students put together "Freedom Writers' Diary." The presentation, also attended by Michigan Education Report, included a forum at which one Howell resident stood up and said she was aware of the history of KKK meetings in the commu-

nity. "Howell isn't that way any more, but there is a certain group that would like to continue that history," she said. "Against gays. Against blacks."

Steve Manor, president of the Livingston County Diversity Council, told Michigan Education Report that he helped to organize the student Diversity Club in the late 1980s. Reports of bullying and harassment of gay students have been made in the district in the past, he said. The club's goal is not to promote one lifestyle, but to protect all students, he said.

"There are people who believe if you protect, you must also be promoting," he told Michigan Education Report, but, "You can protect somebody without endorsing their lifestyle."

Manor said he is satisfied that due process was followed in the book debate, and that the school board should have the final say on such matters. "That's why I elect a school board," he said. "That's a process by which we run a government."

"It's easy to paint someone into a corner and call them intolerant and extreme," school board member Wendy Day said. "I would like to have some really good dialogue, and have some win-win solutions, but Howell doesn't seem to have found a way to do that." Elected to the board in 2006 with support from the LOVE organization, Day has drawn criticism because she is a home-school parent and is viewed as a LOVE supporter.

SUPERINTENDENT SAYS SCHOOL BOARD KEY

Howell Superintendent Charles Breiner, who is in the running to become superintendent of the Saginaw Intermediate School District, agrees that Howell is home to people with a diversity of values. "Everyone is represented along a continuum and you have to decide where to operate along that continuum," he said. "It's not easy to sift out everyone's thought or opinion," he continued. "I answer to the majority of the board (of education) to get to the consensus."

The one constant in the district has been change, he pointed out. Livingston County is considered one of the fastest growing counties in Michigan. The Howell school district added 2,500 students in the past 12 years. That has meant new buildings, teachers, staff and students. But enrollment slowed just as the district completed construction on a second high school, and now Howell may have more space than it needs or can afford to operate, making the building program another topic of debate.

When voters in Howell approved a bond issue to pay for the new high school, the plan was to assign about 1,300 students to each school and still have room for future growth. "Our numbers are not growing as they were prior to this economic downturn," Breiner said, so the current plan is to send all the students to the new Parker High School while the district renovates Howell High School next year. "Then we'll wait and see where the funding is," he added. If there is sufficient funding, both high schools will open.

"We have rapidly moved from a rural school district to... around the 28th largest," Breiner said, something many local residents "would not have imagined hap-

pening in their lifetimes."

"I think Howell has sort of an identity crisis," Day told Michigan Education Report. "Public schools have a tough job. They have a lot of families and values to embrace... Where do we find the balance?"

Breiner said the silver lining in the ongoing debates may be that more people are speaking their minds about the future of the district.

"If there's anything in the past two years that has been good, it's that there's been a lot of discussion taking place," he said. "That's not a bad thing."

Howell also plans to implement a new way of delivering high school education in the fall of 2007, including a program of simultaneous college enrollment that would lead to an associate degree at the end of four years of high school, and flexible scheduling that would allow high school students to take classes on alternate days, weekends, biweekly, during summer vacation or on-line.

Breiner suggested that taking part in school board elections is one way people can change a district. "It's certainly a striking way for people to say, 'This is where we want our organization to be.'"

PARENTAL CHOICE AS SOLUTION

The Cato Institute's McCluskey doesn't believe school board elections will solve the underlying conflicts in schools. At best, it will shift power from one side to the other, he said.

"Rather than let people get the education they want right now through school choice, let's fight it out for years," he said, describing the current process. "We shouldn't say that the best solution for education is to have the group with the most political power force itself on minorities... Factions on all sides really do believe they are absolutely right and no one should be allowed to think differently."

"People have to be aware that there is a better way to get an education without all the fighting," he said. "We need to explain to people that historically, education was delivered much more by parental choice."

Day said she supports more choice in education, but pointed out that those choices are sometimes limited. Not all parents can teach their children at home, drive their children to a charter public school or afford private school tuition, she said.

"We have what is generally

recognized as a very successful school system," Manor said. He does not believe more variety of schools or more choice in education would resolve the issue. "I don't think it's healthy for people to trot off and start their own little institution. We'd become little enclaves of little isolated groups."

Fyke said her grandchildren no longer attend Howell Public Schools, but that she feels a responsibility to other students. "This loud voice is going to continue."

HEALTH INSURANCE ANOTHER ISSUE

Amid other controversies, the Howell Board of Education and Howell Education Association are at odds over teacher health insurance. The two groups have not reached agreement on a new employment contract since the last one expired in June 2006. The board recently voted unanimously to name itself as the policyholder of the district's health insurance plan, rather than the Michigan Education Special Services Association, a third-party, nonprofit insurance administrator formed by the Michigan Education Association. MESSA previously contracted with the district to sell it teacher health benefits, but has said it will not continue to do so if the district holds the policy. Disagreement on the insurance issue has brought hundreds of Howell teachers to school board meetings in recent months. The HEA represents about 485 educators.

MESSA provides insurance for a majority of Michigan school districts, but some districts in recent years have chosen

other providers as a cost-saving measure. A news release from the Howell school board said it believes it can save hundreds of thousands of dollars on health insurance and continue to provide comprehensive benefits without MESSA, but teachers have argued otherwise. HEA President Doug Norton told the local newspaper that teachers are concerned that, as policyholder, the district will change provisions of the insurance coverage at will.

In a flier mailed to area residents in late March, the HEA said that it has proposed a plan that would save the district \$1.4 million from 2006 to 2009, including an offer to accept lower wage increases in exchange for retaining MESSA. Teachers also would contribute \$600 per year to their own coverage costs. The board had offered a two-year contract with pay increases and health coverage with no out-of-pocket premium costs to HEA members. The plan also would add more step increases for the longest-tenured teachers and cash payments for teachers who opt not to participate in the health insurance plan.

Howell is not the only district arguing over MESSA specifically or the cost of teacher health insurance in general. Gov. Jennifer Granholm told the Detroit Free Press in late March that she is willing to consider options to reduce the cost of health and retirement benefits for teachers. She said she has told the Michigan Education Association, a staunch political ally, that long-term changes will be considered.

"The MEA knows there will be a request for reform, health care, pension or whatever," Granholm was quoted in the article. ♦

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Union voted out at American Indian school; staff policies under review

The superintendent of an American Indian school in the Upper Peninsula said the school community is relieved that a vote on decertifying the local teachers union is over and “we can move forward.” The teacher who served as president of the short-lived union described the atmosphere as unsettled.

Teachers at the Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting Anishnabe School in Sault Ste. Marie voted 19-13 in January to decertify the Michigan Education Association as their bargaining representative. Teachers joined the union in 2005, an act that led to a year of controversy between the teachers and the local Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, which said the union presence was a danger to tribal sovereignty. Superintendent Nick Oshelski told Michigan Education Report that the school administration is reviewing employment policies as a way to resolve some of the issues that originally led teachers to certify the union.

The district has formed a staff policy committee of school board members, teachers, support staff and office staff who are reviewing the current staff handbook, he said. When the revised handbook is finished, it will go to the school board for adoption and, if approved, will serve as the written terms of employment for teachers, he said.

“Everyone will have a say,” Oshelski said of the committee process. “This is their time to speak.”

He said the handbook will cover things typically found in a public school teaching contract, ranging from dress code to leaves of absence to grievance procedures. Grievance policies were one area of disagreement between teachers and the previous superintendent, according to Chris Gordon, a language and culture teacher at the school who served as the union president until January’s vote.

Gordon said that teachers in past years were asked to leave without just cause or proper documentation of alleged poor performance, calling those acts the “primary reason” the teachers looked into certifying a union. Another issue is that each teacher is employed under an at-will, one-year teaching agreement. At-will agreements allow either

side — the teacher or the school — to end the teacher’s employment at any time.

Oshelski said the school also is reviewing use of those agreements. “We’re hoping to be able to review the agreements and offer a three-year contract based on satisfactory job performance,” he said.

Asked to describe the atmosphere in the school since the vote, Gordon said, “Questioning, pretty much. Nobody knows what’s really going to happen.” The committee process is “something you can try. The problem is those policies are only as good as the people who follow them.

“When you have a binding contract, you have legal action as a backup,” Gordon added. “Until you have a just cause policy ... and a binding contract, I don’t think much will change yet.”

About 65 percent of the 339 students at Bahweting Anishnabe School are American Indian children who belong to a registered tribe. Enrollment has not been affected by the union debate, Oshelski said; the K-8 school currently has waiting lists in several elementary grades. The school is a federal Bureau of Indian Education grant school, which means it receives money for those children who belong to registered tribes. The Bureau of Indian Education operates within the federal Office of Indian Education. It also is a charter public school authorized by Northern Michigan University and receives per-pupil funding from the state. The combined funding allows the district to spend more per student than other conventional public schools in the area.

Sault Tribal Chairman Aaron Payment said in a prepared statement after the decertification vote that, “This will pave the way for developing a stronger relationship with our teachers and allows the school to address these issues as a unified group and not as adversaries.”

The Sault tribe does not operate the school, but it does own the school building. The tribal board at one point said it would not continue leasing the building to the school if the union remained. It also had suggested it would withdraw from the charter agreement and operate strictly as a tribal school, signifi-



Jessica Flood, academic services provider, works with students at the Bahweting Anishnabe School.

cantly reducing the school budget.

Gordon said the vote to leave the union was a reaction to the tribe’s actions and not to the union itself.

“If the tribe hadn’t threatened us so much, it wouldn’t even have been close,” he said.

Oshelski said the school offers many benefits to teachers and students, including a maximum class size of 20, a full-time paraprofessional in every classroom, money for teaching supplies and salaries at least comparable to local conventional public

schools. Busing is available for all students, and funding is available for extra expenses like field trips and instruments for the school’s string orchestra.

“I’m not going to say it’s all negative,” Gordon said. “We’ve got a lot of things here a lot of public schools can’t offer.” But teachers also have a longer instructional day and are expected to take on extra tasks like serving on committees. “Some people say, ‘Just be happy you have a job.’ Well, I am happy. Does that mean I shouldn’t try to correct things I think are wrong?” ♦

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Here's what readers said about our last issue

Michigan Education Report, invites readers to comment on selected articles by visiting our forum page at <http://forum.educationreport.org>. Here are some comments we received in response to our Spring 2007 issue.

Our article about a program for home-school students at the Delta College campus near Saginaw prompted these comments:

This sounds like a great opportunity for children who are getting educated at home. Many times these children miss out on extracurricular activities and the socialization which take place during them. It also seems like a good way to introduce them to college life. ...

- social worker, Otsego Public Schools

Having spent half of my professional career in parochial schools and the other half in public schools, I fully believe that schools are not “one size fits all.” The specific needs of each child must be taken into consideration and where opportunity allows, parents should have the right to make selections for educational experiences

that meet those specific needs.

That being said, I have difficulty believing that most home-school situations afford quality educational experiences. This article indicates that many home-schoolers also see the weaknesses in home-schooling. By meeting together at Y’s or at churches, they, in effect are creating a private school. My major concern with home-schooling is the quality of instruction. How many parents are qualified to teach advanced or AP quality ELA AND chemistry or trig? My second concern is the social development of home-schooled children. The program at Delta can be a help in this area. But even weekly opportunities for in-depth course work leaves me skeptical that home-school children get the best of opportunities. ...

-counselor, Albion High School

This program is spectacular. With the new high school graduation requirements coming into effect and the inclusion of the ACT into the high school testing setup, any type of additional class offerings, especially those geared toward these new requirements, will be impressively beneficial.

- psychologist, Saginaw Intermediate School District

An article about the West Michigan Health Insurance Pool, and the school districts that joined it as a cost-saving measure, prompted this response:

It is unreal to me that so many of us taxpayers continue to fund MESSA’s insurance without any competition. The schools claim they have no money but it’s all going to MESSA. Kudos to the districts that have the courage to get competing bids and pool their resources.

- health resource consultant, University of Michigan Health System

Two Michigan teachers who participated in the first U.S. House Fellows program were the subject of an article about their experiences, prompting this comment ...

Thanks for informing us of these great opportunities. Hopefully, in the future, we can extend these opportunities to elementary teachers and students as well.

- principal, Williamston Community Schools

Two guest educators argued for and against privatization in ‘Diverse Viewpoints,’ a regular feature of Michigan Education Report. In response, readers said ...

The decision to privatize district services is a tough decision. Within our own district, we have privatized food service management and have moved some of our services to the ISD for more centralized services and district savings without seeing anything less than outstanding service from the employees. Good article and helpful information.

- school board member, Grand Ledge Public Schools

It takes a whole village to raise a child. I can remember who my lunch lady was, the janitor and the aides...all of my years in education. Now, my sons do also. And I want to keep it that way! Our school system has chosen to remain public and not privatize. Good people for good students ...adding the personal touches and feeling as a team...

-teacher, Saginaw Arthur Hill High School

To comment on articles in this issue and learn about our latest iPod winner, visit our forum page at <http://forum.educationreport.org>.



COMMENTARY

Frederick M. Hess

Mayoral Control for Detroit schools? If So, Do It Right

Wracked by low achievement, abysmal dropout rates and plunging enrollment, the Detroit Public Schools have spent years struggling to launch and sustain a coherent program of school improvement.

As would-be reformers seek strategies that can finally turn the situation around, Mayor Kwame M. Kilpatrick is seeking more control over the school system. While mayoral control has become increasingly popular in big city school systems, with proponents pointing to the promising experience of Boston and Chicago, Kilpatrick's efforts are more controversial in light of Detroit's disappointing recent six-year experience with mayoral control.

In 1999, the Michigan legislature empowered Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer to take over the elected school board's responsibilities. The reasons cited included years of failed school reform efforts, a graduation rate estimated to be around 30 percent, abysmal academic performance, declining enrollment and troubling finan-

cial and accounting practices — sound familiar?

The takeover did not deliver the hoped-for results. Six years of mayoral control ended with a return to an elected school board in 2006, capping a period of heated political conflict, stagnant performance and little substantive change. As University of Michigan professor Jeffrey Mirel has noted, racial tensions and political partisanship overwhelmed the mayor's efforts.

It would be a mistake, however, to think the Detroit experience suggests that an elected school board is the best local bet for effective reform governance. In a district facing Detroit's challenges, the ability of mayoral control to provide effective political leadership, an extended time horizon, meaningful accountability and a potential counterweight to the teachers union are vital. The experience under Archer makes clear, though, that these possibilities are just that — and come with no guarantees.

Given the challenges facing Detroit's schools, sensibly designed and sensibly executed mayoral control is more likely to help than to hurt. However, that emphasizes the need to act with eyes wide open.

Contrary to the strong claims of some proponents, there is no rigorous evidence demonstrating the impact of mayoral control. Most studies find no systematic evidence that mayoral control leads to improved governance or achievement. Just one study to date has examined multiple

districts and found achievement gains associated with mayoral control — and those researchers suggested caution in interpreting their findings.

As the previous conflict in Detroit illustrated, mayoral control can also raise legitimate concerns. Mayors may politicize school systems in self-serving ways. Marginal neighborhoods can have more difficulty being heard. In the case of New York City, critics of mayoral control have argued that transparency has suffered.

The reality, however, is that the Detroit Public Schools are so hidebound and district leadership so tangled that mayoral leadership may be imperative if the district is to be righted. That said, how mayoral control is approached next time will matter more than merely whether it is. It's worth trying again, but it needs to be done right.

One issue, of course, is leadership style. Mayor Archer ran into predictable hostility from the powerful Detroit Federation of Teachers and was unable to marshal civic, parental and business support equal to the challenge. Moreover, allowing the takeover to be defined as a legislative incursion meant that the mayor was at odds with his core constituency. If Kilpatrick is serious, he should take a page from Mayor Adrian Fenty in Washington, DC, who has used aggressive salesmanship and a months-long process of public hearings to win key allies and build broad community support.

Beyond that, any proposal for mayoral control should ensure transparency by instituting disclosure requirements prior to any governance change. In the past decade, in the aftermath of malfeasance at firms like Tyco and WorldCom, corporate America saw that overly cozy boards dropped the ball when it came to providing essential scrutiny. Any plan should entail regular, public hearings and reports.

Those reports should feature agreed-upon metrics that need to be established before any change in control. Measures of performance should include more than test scores and graduation rates, they should also be established for areas like staffing, transportation, student safety, construction and finances.

Fourth, transparency is toothless without oversight. Mayoral accountability only works when local public officials, civic leaders and reporters are prepared to ask hard questions and insist on verifiable measures of performance.

Finally, mayoral control only works where, as in Boston or Chicago, mayors put their reputations on the line and their political clout to work. The mayor needs to be a willing, energetic partner if governance reform is to work. ♦

Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute and author of "Looking for Leadership: Assessing the Case for Mayoral Control of Urban School Systems." His e-mail is rhess@aei.org.

SHORT SUBJECTS

continued from Page One

A Clinton teacher has resigned in a conflict over his refusal to wear an identification badge. Steve Walters, fired by the Clinton Board of Education in March, originally said he would appeal the dismissal to the Michigan State Teacher Tenure Commission. He later withdrew his appeal and resigned, according to local news accounts, saying that even if his individual firing were overturned, the same policy would be in place in the school district. The district has required staff to wear identification badges since January as a security measure, but Walters said the badges and security cameras create an atmosphere of fear and suspicion.

Free Soil Community Schools will not offer a high school program next year due to low enrollment and corresponding budget pressures, the Ludington Daily News reported in March. The Board of Education of the Mason County school district said it will attempt to continue a K-8 program. Last year the community held numerous fund-raisers, like a spaghetti dinner and scrap metal drive, to allow the high school it to remain open for 2006-2007.

The Detroit Federation of Teachers owes about \$2 million in past dues to its state and national affiliates and is working out a payment plan with the organizations to avoid going broke by September. The union's cash-flow problems were caused in part by the purchase of a new building in 2004, unbudgeted costs from a two-week strike last fall and declining membership, according to President Virginia Cantrell. Cantrell, who was elected in December, said the organization's budget problems could be compounded by the school district's own money woes, which administration officials said could lead to more layoffs — and subsequent dips in union membership and dues — for next school year.

The Ann Arbor school district has offered buyouts to about 170 teachers to reduce costs and avoid layoffs for the next school year. The proposed buyouts, which must be approved by the union and the school board, are part of a plan to cut \$7.4 million from next year's budget. The Ann Arbor News reported in March that the cuts would allow the district to balance the 2007-2008 budget without taking money from the district's \$23 million cash reserve fund.



COMMENTARY

Monika Leasure and Eugene Pierce

Michigan's Economic Future: Is a Four-Year Degree the Only Answer?

The last time you had an electrical problem, did you call a college professor or a doctor or a tech company in another country? Or, like most people, did you call a local electrician? Could any of those other people have helped you? Probably not. Did the electrician arrive immediately or did you have to wait your turn because he was so busy? Did this electrician have a college diploma? Most likely he didn't, but he did have postsecondary training in a technical field and hours of actual experience. As innovations impact his field, workers like him will return to a community college or a technical school to upgrade their skills so they can stay competitive. In the process, they will make \$80,000 a year. Does this sound unlikely?

Not all high-wage, high-demand jobs require a four-year degree. Consider the facts: More than 80 percent of industry respondents to the 2005 Skills Gap survey by the National Association of Manufacturers indicated that they are experiencing a shortage of qualified workers, with 13 percent reporting a severe shortage. More than 90 percent also reported a shortage of qualified skilled production employees, such as machinists, operators, craft workers, distributors and technicians. The fastest-growing and largest sources of high-skills employment in the economy go begging for technical workers because so few teens are choosing these careers. The problem for

these fields is not an undersupply of college graduates, but an undersupply of technically skilled graduates.

While there are those who think that a four-year degree is the only way to achieve economic security, national statistics show that the current job market does not necessarily support that thinking. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the number of jobs requiring technical degrees has increased significantly while the number requiring four-year professional degrees has remained consistent at about 20 percent of the market. The percentage of jobs calling for a technical or associate's degree has grown from 15 percent in 1950 to 65 percent today. Further, the department predicted in 2005 that the job market will still need only 20 percent of the workforce to have four-year degrees in 2010, but the need for technical skills and industry certification will continue to grow. Yet the push for young students today is the baccalaureate degree, without equal consideration for careers that are in high-demand fields.

Career technical education traditionally focuses on high-skill careers in high-demand and high-growth fields, with emphasis on varying levels of education, from a certificate program to two- or four-year degrees. The goal is linked to strong economic competitiveness. Data from the 2004 National Assessment of Vocational Education by the U.S. Office of Vocational

and Adult Education indicated that students enrolled in Career Technical Education classes over the past 10 years also took more higher-level academic courses than previously, that scores on academic achievement exams rose significantly more among CTE students than among non-CTE students over the same period of time and that CTE students' earnings increase about 2 percent for each CTE course they complete, making the benefits of technical training evident.

Students who are focused in their CTE classes often are successful earlier in their careers. Take the case of Michelle. In her automotive technology class in high school, Michelle restored a 1988 Thunderbird Turbo Coupe. With a lifelong passion for automobiles and engines, she worked at a local dealership as an extern for three years, through high school and while continuing her education at the community college. Successfully participating in national skills competitions gave her the confidence to pursue her desire to become a certified mechanical technician. She takes classes to stay current in her field and has received numerous awards for her work. Michelle has worked at the dealership for four years, earning more than \$75,000 a year.

In her State of the State speech in February, Gov. Jennifer Granholm said there are 84,000 unfilled jobs in Michigan. While some require a four-year degree, many of those jobs require postsecondary technical certifications, including skilled trades, plumbing, welding and tool-and-die making. In the past two years there also has been an emphasis on entrepreneurship as a means of improving Michigan's economy through new technologies. Entrepre-

neurs tend to be like eagles — flying alone. Traditional bachelor degree programs often do not meet the needs of these innovators who develop markets in new and emerging fields. Rather, entrepreneurs need a wide range of technical skills to be successful. Educational programs that offer industry-based certifications and those that can rapidly modify curriculum to reflect advancements in technology will attract and support the creative entrepreneurs of the future.

Michigan's economy is at a critical juncture. The globalization of business and industry requires people in the workforce who can apply, upgrade and adapt their learning to meet the new challenges. Biotechnology, DNA forensics, robotics and aquaculture are careers that are far different today than 10 years ago. This is the future of our children and our society: an ever-spiraling series of career changes that require increasing levels of technical knowledge. A career-focused education, with strong technical skills development, can supply that knowledge for the students of Michigan and provide the economic stability we need to remain competitive.

It is important to push the goal of higher education for all students. However, when we focus only on the outcome of a four-year degree, and not the path to a high-wage, high-demand career, we may be losing out on many opportunities to make our citizens truly competitive. It is imperative that we consider all options in seeking an answer to Michigan's economic future. ♦

Monika Leasure and Eugene Pierce are regional administrators for Career Technical Education with the Macomb Intermediate School District and the Tuscola Intermediate School District, respectively.

Should Michigan raise the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18?

YES: Leaving school at 16 is a recipe for disaster



Michael Walters

Imagine this scene. A remote village is nestled near a high cliff. Children play in the village, but an older adolescent child perches on the edge of the cliff, poised to jump. Our hero runs to the youth....

Our hero: You must come down from there. I will save you!

Child: No, I've decided to jump. I think I can fly.

Our hero: Fly? You'll fall to your death, or at least hurt yourself!

Child: I'm old enough to decide for myself. I'm going to fly.

Our hero: But it's too high...! You'll hurt yourself...! Oh, well, I guess you are old enough to decide for yourself. I'll just be going....

You've never seen this scene in a movie and you never will. We could never root for a hero with so little backbone. No one — heroic or ordinary — could sit idly and watch harm come to a child.

Yet we've done that for years, right here in our own state, with our own children.

Children in Michigan are only required to attend school until the age of 16. This policy should be changed. It is harmful to children. Students should be compelled to attend school until the age of 18.

At one time, the compulsory age of 16 was quite reasonable. Teen-age children often elected to enter the labor force or get married. By the age of 16, they had learned all that they would need to know to function well in the society of that day. Times have changed.

Census Bureau statistics support the following widely held notions: The days of abundant, minimally skilled, well-paid jobs have passed, and people are electing to marry later — much later, delaying matrimony until they are well into their 20s.

Why then, would anyone advocate allowing a 16-year-old to drop out of school? We know that jumping off a cliff would be lethal. We also know that leaving school at the age of 16 is, in most cases, a recipe for disaster.

The contributing factors underlying our lack of courage and rectitude are many (and too convoluted) to discuss here. Suffice to say that, metaphorically speaking, while we all agree that we are living in the same village and that, "it takes a village to raise a child," our voices are stifled. Our heads are down, focused on tending our own fields. We dare not look up, for then we may be compelled to correct another villager's child who has gone astray.

I, too, have been a speechless villager.

A teacher for 23 years, I have no problem correcting children in my classroom. It's part of the job. Recently I was in my local library working on a project. Early in the day the librarian shared with me her concern about the unruliness of some of the young "regulars" — students who came to the library every day after school, obliging her to do double duty as a babysitter. I commiserated with her. When school dismissed, the regulars rolled in. By 3:15, I thought I had been transported to a typical, noisy school cafeteria, minus the food fights. The librar-

ian approached and asked them to be quiet. I was in the next aisle, scanning the low shelves, able to see and hear everything.

One child, a boy of about 10, persisted in a dialogue that would be at least impertinent, but more appropriately labeled as disrespectful. "We're not too loud!" "What are you going to do about it?" "You can't make me leave!"

I did not say one word.

I am embarrassed by this. Moreover, I'm bothered by this, and not just because I let the librarian down. By now she's probably all too used to this equation: Not my child equals not my problem. What really bothers me is that I let those children down — the impertinent boy and his friends who witnessed the event. They may have learned more from that 30-second exchange than they had all day in school. And that lesson, indirectly affirmed by my silent presence, will not serve them well in the future.

I tell the story because I don't want it to seem that I'm pointing my finger in blame at anyone. We're all to blame. We know what young people need to enjoy a happy, healthy, successful life. Because children are young and tender, we do not allow them to potentially endanger their bodies by joining the military until they're 18. Because they may be naive, we do not allow predatory salesmen to bind them to a legal contract until they're 18. Because their lack of experience would not allow them to make informed decisions, we do not allow children to vote until they are 18. Because we know that tobacco is harmful, we do not allow them to purchase those products until they are 18. We know what's good for our children. Why, then, don't we tell them that their happiness, their future, their lives would be seriously impaired if they drop out at 16?

I think it has something to do with love.

Without hesitation, I can tell my students (and my own child) to do something I know they probably won't like (write an essay, read Shakespeare, eat vegetables) because I know it is good for them. I'm willing to risk the potential backlash (complaints, anger, etc.) because I love them. What pains me is the realization that I just didn't care enough about those library "regulars" to risk the possible backlash to help them.

Our children need us. If we love our children, they must be compelled to attend school until their 18th birthday. If we really care, we must lift our heads and find our voices. The message may not be popular, but it is needed. We must speak as the village, through our leaders. Who will be our voice? Who will be our hero? I hope it will be you.

And me. ♦

Michael Walters is an English teacher at Millennium High School, Detroit Public Schools.

NO: Michigan should figure out why students leave



Scott W. Baker

Reducing the dropout rate is the rationale behind the proposal to increase the compulsory attendance age to 18, but does a higher compulsory attendance age result in higher graduation rates? Of the 10 states with the best graduation rates (based on 2001-2002 data from the National Center for Education Statistics), only two — Utah (4th) and Wisconsin (7th) — compel attendance to the age of 18. The rest allow students to leave at 16. Of the 10 states with the lowest graduation rates, one (New Mexico) mandates attendance to age 18. Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee are at 17 and the remaining states at 16.

Does it foster high achievement? Of the six countries scoring highest on the Program for International Student Assessment mathematics exam in 2003, only one — the Netherlands — requires school attendance to the age of 18. The others range from age 14 (Korea, Hong Kong, and Macao-China) to 16 (Canada, Finland, and Liechtenstein). Over-



seas, less is more.

The proponents of this legislation are claiming it will provide economic benefits. I'm dubious. It will certainly create jobs, just not the high-tech, high-skill jobs we are led to believe. Most of the new jobs would be "school" jobs. Keeping young adults in the system longer will increase student populations, requiring more teachers, administrators, custodians, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, textbooks, hot lunches and standardized tests. In this case it's not "higher education" that will result in more jobs, but "bigger education," a more ponderous system that would require additional funding at a time when the state can't fulfill its current financial obligations.

Costliness and lack of efficacy aside, my objections to the state's reliance on compulsory attendance are more fundamental and speak to the real challenge facing our educational system. "There are only two places where time takes precedence over the job to be done — school and prison," observed psychologist William Glasser. Government, at both the state and federal levels, has become increasingly heavy-handed in imposing its agenda on our children, demanding more and more of their childhood. Children are born indentured servants

to the state, which now wants to extend their sentence in the name of the economy (also note that recently introduced legislation, Senate Bill 162, would make kindergarten attendance mandatory for 5-year-olds). As a parent, I'm angry.

As a teacher, I'm appalled. There are few things more rewarding than teaching students who want to learn and few things more frustrating and pointless than trying to teach students who have no interest in learning material essentially force-fed them. Their attitude is understandable when the meal consists of the watered-down stew of Michigan's one-size-fits-none "grade-level-content-expectations." The old saw, "You can lead a horse to water..." has been revised for the new millennium. It's now, "Drag the horse to water, and then push his head under because drowning looks like drinking from a distance."

Perhaps the attraction of raising the attendance age to 18 is that it relieves educators of the thoughtful effort necessary to actually examine why students are dropping out of school and to craft equally thoughtful and creative solutions. Mandatory attendance is the legislative equivalent of the weak trump card parents play when trying to coerce obedience from children: "Because I said so!"

The proposal to extend compulsory attendance to age 18 is a sham, floated only because of an absence of any better ideas, much like the recently imposed "tougher" graduation requirements: Forcing all students to take Algebra 2 certainly sounds rigorous. It looks like you're doing something substantive, but it's a great sound and fury signifying nothing.

High achievement is not the result of more seat time. It is the product of students' complete engagement in a discipline they find relevant and valuable, and there is no better way to extinguish the innate joy of learning than by relying on coercion. Plato understood that when he wrote, "Knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind." Einstein's experiences at the autocratic Luitpold Gymnasium caused him to later remark, "It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry... It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty."

A vote against Senate Bill 11 and/or House Bill 4042 is not a vote against education. It would be a demonstration of our faith in the value of the education we offer (while recognizing there is much room for improvement), faith in the ability of our teachers to present it engagingly (except when frantically cramming for high-stakes standardized tests), and faith in our young adults' ability to make the right decision regarding their education. ♦

Scott W. Baker, an elementary special education teacher in Shelby Public Schools, previously worked for 12 years as a high school resource teacher. He blogs at <http://perfectlydocile.typepad.com>.

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