School vouchers would be available for parents of students in seven Michigan school districts, including Detroit’s 170,000 public school students, under a fall ballot proposal, according to a state high school dropout report released in September. See related stories, right and page 5.

Private schools returned money to the state last year when half of the schools participating in Michigan’s voucher program didn’t need to use all of the $4,894 they were given to educate students in the program. Meanwhile, the American Enterprise Institute reports that Michigan public school officials are preparing to approve a 2000-01 education budget that provides $9,500 per student to the city’s public schools.

Detroit public schools CEO Kenneth Burnley is considering hiring a company to run as many as 45 of the city’s worst schools. According to a new report from the Mackinac Center for Policy Research, the “Education Freedom Index” gives top marks to states offering low tax dollars to be spent on private schools. A Florida District Court of Appeals recently upheld that state’s school voucher law as constitutional. The decision reversed a trial court to address other claims raised by the school employee unions.

Michigan ranks 11th nationwide in “education freedom,” according to an annual report from the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. The “Education Freedom Index” gives top marks to states offering parents greater educational choices. It found that more choices among public, charter, private, and home schools equal better academic achievement outcomes for all students in a state. Arizona topped the list, while Georgia came in last. The report can be viewed at www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_14.htm.

A Florida District Court of Appeals recently upheld that state’s school voucher law as constitutional. The three-judge panel overturned on Oct. 3 an earlier ruling by a Tallahassee trial judge that said the law violated the state constitution by allowing tax dollars to be spent on private schools. The decision reversed the case to the trial court to address other claims raised by the school employee unions.

Education reform has emerged as one of the leading issues of the 2000 presidential campaign. Opinion polls consistently show large numbers of parents concerned about the state of public schools, and a majority of candidates supporting school choice. George Bush and Al Gore are tailoring their messages to appeal to this concern.

The state would be required to provide tax-funded vouchers for nonpublic school tuition, worth half of the per-pupil expenditure on public schools, for students in districts with graduation rates less than two-thirds. Seven of Michigan’s 555 school districts, including Detroit, automatically would be affected the first year. Other districts could decide by school board action or a vote of local residents if they wished to adopt vouchers.

The issue of school vouchers will take political center stage Nov 7, 2000, as Michigan voters go to the polls to decide if a measure known as Proposal 1 should be adopted to amend the state constitution. The proposal, if approved, would overturn the constitutional ban on K-12 vouchers, tax credits, and other forms of indirect aid to families wishing to choose nonpublic education for their children.

The study, over $600 million per year for remedial ed Communities weigh in on unprepared students at public forums across Michigan

Michigan businesses and institutions of higher learning are paying an estimated $600 million per year due to the lack of basic reading, writing, and math skills among students and employees, according to a study released in September by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. We’re not talking about higher-level skills. We’re talking about reading, basic grammar, and simple arithmetic—skills every citizen must possess in order to survive in an increasingly complex world,” says study author Dr. Jay P. Greene.

Greene is senior fellow with the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research and a research associate with the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance. The study, “The Cost of Remedial Education” is a companion to his earlier study: “Michigan Pays When 3 Students Fail To Learn Basic Skills,” reached its astonishing estimate of remediation costs by employing five separate strategies and taking an average of the five figures.

Bush, Gore see larger education role for feds Disagree mostly over school choice

Education reform has emerged as one of the leading issues of the 2000 presidential campaign. Opinion polls consistently show large numbers of parents concerned about the state of public schools, and a majority of candidates supporting school choice. George Bush and Al Gore are tailoring their messages to appeal to this concern.

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Accordingly, federal education policy can have a great impact on Michigan teachers, schools, and students. Michigan Education Report 2000 therefore has compiled a report for its readers a summary of the two major party candidates’ positions on various education issues, culled from Web sites and public pronouncements.

Federal role in education

Both candidates support a strong federal role in education, but disagree on the degree to which that role should be expanded.

Bush proposes to consolidate over 60 federal programs into five categories including disavantaged children, bilingual education, teacher quality, character education, and school choice. He favors moving the “Head Start” program from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Education and the creation of several new large federal programs. States may opt out of federal regulations if they choose private schools.

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Proposal 1

continued from page 1

According to the Web site of Kids First! Yes!, the group promoting Proposal 1, “But too many children in Michigan are not being educated to their full potential. They’re trapped in schools that don’t work.”

Kids First! Yes! says its proposal would improve education in many ways, and that periodically testing teachers for competency is an important oversight, means of achieving better schools.

Many educators agree that whether or not children succeed in school depends on the knowledge, skill, and commitment of their teachers,” says the Kids First! Yes! Web site.

According to current law, new teachers who were state-certified after 1992 are presently required to pass a test, but the vast majority of teachers in the state have not been tested.

“Opponents of education reform have tried very hard to divert attention from teacher testing, but the overwhelming majority of Michigan parents and taxpayers support this common-sense reform,” says Kids First! Yes! Co-Chairman Dick 0-Wos.

“Teacher testing is an idea whose time has come,” 0-Wos said.

The political battle over the proposal has indeed focused on its most controversial aspect, vouchers. “Vouchers have been cleverly packaged as a plan to help the poor,” according to the ALL Kids First! Web site.

“All Kids First! says an anti-voucher coalition of public school groups and unions including the Michigan Education Association, “But it is precisely these kids who will be hurt most by a weakened and abandoned public school system.”

Fear of an “abandoned” public education system is no reason to vote no on the proposal, say supporters. “The Kids First! Yes! funding guarantee will protect school districts againstaacutepetitn on their per-child funding due to a recession or a change in funding policy by politicians,” says the Kids First! Yes! Web site.

Proposal 1 supporters add that public school districts will not be harmed, pointing to the First! Yes! Web site.

The Department of Education data also lists 188 school districts with graduation rates above 90 percent, including 15 that graduated 100 percent of their students. (See page 5 for a related story and chart on statewide graduation and dropout rates.)

While acknowledging that “Michigan has some great schools,” Kids First! Yes! notes that citizens nevertheless should be concerned if there are any children not being served by their schools.

Supporters of Proposal 1 believe

What Is Proposal 1?

The State Board of Canvassers agreed in mid-August to the following language for Proposal 1:

The proposed constitutional amendment would:

1. Establish a system by which a public school district could use tuition vouchers in certain school districts, and require enactment of teacher testing laws.

2. Allow students to receive tuition vouchers if their schools do not meet certain standards on academic subjects in public schools and in nonpublic schools re-deeming tuition vouchers.

3. Require teacher testing on academic subjects in public schools and in nonpublic schools re-deeming tuition vouchers.


Should this proposal be adopted? Yes or No?

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Michigan Education Report

Published by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy

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Michigan Education Report is a news and analysis quarterly published by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, research and educational institution devoted to an informed discussion of public policy issues. Michigan Education Report is received by over 130,000 M ichigan teachers, administrators, school board members, policy experts, and elected officials. Copyright © 2000. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce any article contained herein is hereby granted provided that Michigan Education Report, the author, and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy are properly cited, and a copy of the reprint is sent to the editor. Please contact the editor.

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Teacher shortage forces states to relax rules for educators

Alternative certification opens classrooms to other qualified instructors

Any education reformers have long warned that state teacher certification requirements, instead of ensuring teacher quality, were rigid and bureaucratic. That they actually were keeping the best and the brightest instructors out of America's classrooms.

Now, a severe, nationwide teacher shortage means schools are scrambling to modify those teaching requirements—and not necessarily to find better teachers, but just to find teachers.

The U.S. Department of Education says America will need more than a million new teachers by 2010, or almost half the number of teachers currently in the teaching profession. And that's teachers who stay and don't transfer for other, more rewarding jobs. 20 percent of all new teachers leave the profession within three years. An entire generation of veterans, now in their late 40s and 50s, is expected to retire in the next decade. And the demand for smaller class sizes means more teachers will be needed per school.

To help solve this problem, many states are adopting alternative teacher certification requirements. To remove what reform experts have long regarded as a “bottleneck” in the acquisition of new teachers. According to School Reform N.ews, in the last two years, 14 states have passed, introduced, or plan to introduce new legislation to establish alternative programs to prepare and certify individuals who already have a bachelor's degree and want to become teachers. Those states are Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The National Center for Education Information (N CEI) says that in 1998, more than 24,000 new teachers were certified through alternative programs. The total number of teachers certified through these programs now totals over 125,000. "What we are seeing are market forces and certification requirements, instead of ensuring teacher quality, were rigid and bureaucratic. They actually were keeping the best and the brightest instructors out of America’s classrooms.

Michigan Lags Other States on Alternative Teacher Certification

With more than half of the states implementing alternative teacher certification programs to deal with a looming nationwide teacher shortage, Michigan is still trying to come up with a plan. According to Dr. Carolyn Logan, director of the Office of Teacher/Administrator Preparation and Certification for the Michigan Department of Education, officials are looking at a 1995 proposal for “individualized” teaching certificates, which might be “customized according to the qualifications each person brings, or doesn’t bring, to the profession.”

"Unfortunately [the proposal] got a ‘no thank you’ in 1995, Logan says, because it was viewed as a quick fix, which would devalue the standard teaching certificate.

But now. Logan and her staff are devising ways to bring the proposal back. “The timing is much better because of the huge amount of publicity surrounding the pending teacher shortage,” she says. Furthermore, there are particularly vital subject areas in which Michigan is coming up short, for example, in physics, math, chemistry, and foreign languages. Logan also says minorities and males are underrepresented in Michigan’s teacher population, a lack of diversity that justifies “looking beyond the traditional candidate.”

One means offering incentives that historically have been mostly used in the private sector. For example, Logan believes teacher recruitment eventually will include “recruitment packages” in which school districts, out of desperation, offer prospective teachers a signing bonus, pay moving expenses, and even pre-arrange home mortgages, as a way of attracting experienced and certified teachers to their faculties. Logan believes that as teacher salaries increase, teaching will become more attractive to men, who come in and tend to stay. “Some of them migrate to administration, because of higher salaries there,” she says. “They move up for the increased pay.”

Over the next year or so, Logan’s staff intends to design a process through which people with baccalaureate degrees can receive credit for the skills and credentials they bring to the profession of teaching and get the training they need in the areas where they are lacking.

The active part of such a program would focus on the skills, information, and training prospective teachers need. For instance, Logan says, “Does a prospective teacher need courses in ‘human development’ to understand better how to work with children, or do they already have those skills through kids, grandchildren, or church?”

Logan wants to come up with an expedited certification plan than satisfies all the necessary requirements and try to sell that plan to the various educational institutions and offices that would have to sign off on it. “She envisions a certification process that is short, intensive, and would equip the candidate with the essentials, plus a mentor.”

One problem yet to be worked out is how to attach academic credit to the program, so that it will count for graduate school. “But with the right program in place, Michigan could greatly expand its pool of teacher candidates and begin placing them at a far quicker pace than we can now,” Logan says.

Michigan’s plan, should it be fully developed and implemented, could be a year away, or more. To contact the Office of Teacher/Administrator Preparation and Certification, call (517) 373-6505.

Another twist to the growing teacher shortage is that most alternative certifications are “individualized.” The state came up with a certification plan than satisfies all the necessary requirements and try to sell that plan to the various educational institutions and offices that would have to sign off on it. “She envisions a certification process that is short, intensive, and would equip the candidate with the essentials, plus a mentor.”

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Perhaps best of all, alternative certification is bringing in individuals who are more likely to accept positions where demand for qualified teachers is greatest: in inner cities, in rural areas, and in subject areas such as math and science.
Charter school cap to remain for now

The Legislature will not consider in September or October a measure to raise Michigan's charter school cap. A bill to raise the cap was tabled before the summer recess. The current cap on university-chartered schools is 150; the bill would increase this cap by 25 per year, up to 225 in 2002. The last chance for the bill to be considered this year would be if the Legislature reconvenes briefly after the November elections. Failing that, the bill will be extinguished and have to be reintroduced in the next Legislature.

School administrators might access police database

S.B. 945, sponsored by state Sen. Leon Stille, R-Spring Lake, would give school administrators limited access to the Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN). This is the same data bank that police personnel use to check license plate numbers for traffic violations and other information. Administrators say they have had problems with suspicious or abandoned cars near schools and in school parking lots. The bill would allow school officials to learn the vehicle registration information of any vehicle within 1,000 feet of school property. The bill has been passed by the Senate and now passed out of the House Education Committee. It has not yet been voted on by the full House.

Mercury in schools to be eliminated

State Sen. Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, has introduced S.B. 1262 to prohibit schools from purchasing, storing, or using free-flowing mercury, or to use a scientific lab instrument containing mercury, after 2004. High levels of exposure to mercury may cause damage to the central nervous system and internal organs, and even death. The Department of Environmental Quality has reported 14 mercury spills in schools since 1994. This bill has been passed by the Senate and referred to the House Committee on Education where, at press time, it remained. M ercury encapsulated and secure, as in certain light switches, would not be affected.

Teacher certification may require reading disorder training

H.B. 4378, introduced by state Rep. Bob Brown, D-Dearborn Heights, would require the superintendent of public instruction to establish new standards for diagnosing students with reading disorders and for providing those students with specialized training in reading. If passed, all teachers in training will be required to take a course in reading disorders. Since it is required for all certifications, all new teachers must take the course regardless of whether they teach chemistry, calculus, Spanish, or physical education.

Currently a teacher-in-training is required to have six hours of reading methods for elementary certification and three hours for secondary certification. According to proponents of the bill, this training does not emphasize recognizing reading disorders, such as dyslexia, and how to teach students with these problems. As a result, they claim, the disorders go undiagnosed and many of those students fail to achieve their academic potential. The House passed the bill and it now moves to the Senate, with very limited time left in this session.

School gift procedures proposed

As increasing numbers of alumni give significant financial support to their former high schools, one legislator believes the Board of Education should provide specified guidelines for school districts handling the investment of gifts. Rep. Scott Schachtele, R-Sault Ste. Marie, has introduced H.B. 5786, which establishes procedures for spending such gifts to a community foundation or educational foundation for management. The bill would govern how the money is handled. At press time, the bill was before the Education Committee.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Bill cites national programs as model for teaching kids values

On Feb. 15, state Rep. Valde Garcia, R-St. Johns, introduced a bill to amend the Michigan Revised School Code to include a K-12 curriculum requirement for a program in “character development.”

The content of the program would have to be “the same or similar to the Character Counts! program or the Character First! program in "character development.""

The Character Counts! program is the brainchild of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, a nationwide nonpartisan organization that is leading the rapidly growing “character education” movement. The program aims to "fortify the lives of America's young people with consensus ethical values called the 'core values': character strengths, personal worth, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship," says the program’s Web site, www.charactercounts.org.

The Character First! program was developed by the Oklahoma-based Character Training Institute, an organization that provides character training for employees in the workplace.

Character First! promotes values including “alertness, attentiveness, self-control, kindness, forgiveness, and truthful-ness,” according to its Web site, www.characterfirst.org.

A third program, not mentioned in Garcia’s bill, is Character Counts! Partnership of Washington, D.C. The CEPl Web site (www.character.org) describes the organization as “an ongoing coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to developing moral character and civic virtue in our nation’s youth by creating a more compassionate and responsible society.” CEPl—which includes school employee unions, school board and administrator associations, and the PTA—has developed “eleven principles of effective character education” which it believes are key to "instilling character values such as respect, responsibility, and honesty" in students.

Michigan State University Extension—Michigan’s extension service—found in Character Counts! and which offers character "training and curriculum for adults and teens in several locations across Michigan"—takes part in many areas including agriculture, natural resources, community development, families, and children—tak es part in the Character Counts! program.

According to its Web site, www.msue.msu.edu, Character Counts! offers character "training and curriculum for adults and teens in several locations across Michigan." The training features materials to assist adults and even teenagers in teaching children in five different age groups about character.

In Oct. 1996, the Michigan State Board of Education adopted a policy encouraging "public schools to provide character education focusing on principles" similar to those found in Character Counts! and which Garcia’s bill seeks to promote.

Garcia's bill was referred to the House Education Committee, where it has yet to be voted on.
Future education majors score below state average on SAT

R eport: performance subpar for likely teachers

A recently released summary of SAT scores for the nominal high school class of 2000 reveals that students intending to major in education scored below the state average in both math and verbal performance. According to "2000 Profile of College Bound Seniors," a report from the College Board, the organization that administers the SAT, 10,280 Michigan high school students from the class of 2000 took the SAT I test. The report presents SAT math and verbal scores and also the students’ "intended college major," chosen from 23 categories. The tables below show the math and verbal scores and intended college major for the highest and lowest performing students.

Of concern to many educators is the fact that the highest performing students are not choosing education as a field of study in college. Of the 10 percent of students who selected education as a major, their average math score is 35 points below the state average. The average verbal score for education majors is 26 points below the state average.

This is not to say that all teachers are coming from this pool. In fact, many education experts believe that future teachers should major in a non-education subject area, such as math or biology, to develop content mastery, and supplement their major coursework with education theory and practice classes.

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<th>Highest and Lowest Math Ranking and Scores by Intended Major</th>
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<th>Class of 2000: What Will They Study in College?</th>
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State releases school graduation and dropout numbers

R eport tells which districts Proposal 1 would affect

In September, the Michigan Department of Education released its report on the 1998-99 graduation and dropout rates for the state's 355 state school districts, including 18 public school academies. The State Aid Act requires the Department of Education to provide the Legislature with this annual "District Membership Retention Report."

The report this year has added significance due to Proposal 1, an education reform initiative scheduled to appear on the November ballot. If approved, the state would be required to provide tax-funded vouchers for nonpublic school tuition for students in districts whose 1998-99 graduation rates were below two-thirds. The average district graduation rate is 81.12 percent.

According to the report, seven districts qualify for immediate vouchers, and prominent on the list is the 170,000-student Detroit City School District. Vouchers will not apply in any of the other districts, unless a majority of students in one of the other districts later vote them in. (See story on page 1.)

The report also lists 188 school districts with graduation rates under 90 percent, with 76 of those being over 95 percent and 48 scoring a 100 percent rate.

The entire report can be accessed via Internet at www.mde.state.mi.us/reports/distmembet.pdf.
Byrd soars at Saginaw public school
Busy senior juggles academics, work, and community service

The alarm goes off at 6:35 a.m. It’s the start of another school day for Javanese Byrd, a senior at public Arthur Hill High School in Saginaw, Mi. of her classmates are getting up at the same time, but unlike them, Javanese has had only 5 1/2 hours of sleep.

There are things to be done, after all. The National Honor Society student not only maintains a 3.8 grade point average in her classes—which include French, Astronomy, World Literature, Yearbook, and Broadcast Journalism—she also makes time for the Pep Club, Student Government, the Black Studies Club, community service, and, until recently, girls’ varsity basketball.

“She’s personable and outgoing, an easy-to-like kid, but basketball at this level wasn’t her cup of tea,” says Vonnie Killmer, Arthur Hill’s girls’ basketball coach. “I think she’d really rather spend her time in extracurricular activities like Student Government, where she is so gifted.”

Student Government is not the only area where Javanese is gifted. Her responsibilities in putting the high school’s yearbook together include the demanding and all-important task of coordinating the senior pictures. “Javanese is an upbeat girl who has the follow-through to handle a big section of our yearbook,” says Patsy Procufo, a journalism teacher.

Javanese also is one of only eight students who are receiving training and daily hand-on experience with the television equipment in Arthur Hill’s full-service television studio. Dave Kabobel, who teaches Arthur Hill’s broadcast journalism class, oversees Javanese and his other students as they prepare and broadcast a five-8 minute show to the closed circuit TVs mounted in each of the school’s classrooms. The broadcasts cover school announcements, upcoming school events, interviews with new teachers, and footage from recent athletic events.

Javanese’s experience with broadcasting has made her rekindle her career aspirations. Whereas before she was interested in health services, she now wants to explore opportunities as a TV journalist. “The competition is fierce,” she says, “but I’d like to work for a network like CNN someday.”

Javanese also is busy socially and off campus. Recently, she was elected to the school’s Homecoming Court. And three days each week, she works in the daycare center at the nearby YMCA, where she watches and plays with the kids from 4:30 to 9 p.m. After work, she does her homework until midnight or later. On Saturdays, she works with the Ivyettes, a teen group that performs community service, such as raising money for food baskets for the homeless at T’Hanksgiving.

What’s next for Javanese? In her junior year, she applied to and was accepted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She remains undecided about which school to attend next, but one thing she’s sure of is that her time in high school has been great.

“I love Arthur Hill,” she says. “If I had a chance to start all over from 9th grade I’d still come here.”

She is a former nurse with no teaching certificate or degree in education. But Nora Chahbazi is as dedicated, passionate, and effective a teacher as you’ll find anywhere.

Chahbazi is the owner and primary instructor at Ounce of Prevention Reading Center in Flushing. The center offers reading assistance to children and adults for whom traditional methods of teaching reading, such as phonics, have not been effective.

Chahbazi employs a new reading method called “Phono-Graphix” to teach her students. She discovered Phono-Graphix in the book “Why Our Children Can’t Read” by Diane McGuinness, professor of psychology at the University of South Florida.

“After just a few hours with Phono-Graphix, my daughter could read better than she ever had in her life,” Chahbazi explains. “She went from struggling with reading pages, to reading whole chapters in just a few hours of work.”

Chahbazi’s success at teaching her daughter to read led her to help her friends’ children with their reading. Soon she enrolled in a course to be trained as a reading therapist in Phono-Graphix, and shortly thereafter she opened her center.

“There are thousands of people like me and my family who need help. I just want to give them a chance,” she says. “I love doing this.”

At the center, students ranging in age from 3 to 6 are instructed according to the Phono-Graphix method, which Chahbazi says can help beginning readers as well as those in need of remedial education. Her center, in fact, works closely with local teachers to provide remediation services for students who need them. She also trains parents and teachers in the Phono-Graphix method so that they in turn can use it to teach other children to read.

Phono-Graphix, says Chahbazi, is the antithesis of traditional methods of reading instruction, which teach students symbols (letters) and the corresponding sounds they “make” and emphasize spelling rules and memorization. Phono-Graphix operates in reverse, building off of what students already know about sounds and speech. Phono-Graphix students are taught that the sounds they know can be represented in print by “sound pictures,” or letter combinations.

This “sound picture” approach works on everyone, including dyslexics and students with learning disabilities,” says Chahbazi. “Studies have shown that almost all children instructed in Phono-Graphix—students who struggled with traditional reading methods—achieved their grade level or better in just 12 hours.”

Through her training seminars, Chahbazi hopes to expose teachers across the state to the Phono-Graphix method over the next few years, so that more students who struggle with reading can be taught this way.

The most rewarding part of this program is when the students’ eyes light up and they finally ‘get it,’” she says. “Some of my students have been through years of traditional remedial reading programs, with no avail, and this program gives them new hope and makes them realize they can learn to read.”
Ann Arbor foundation funds private school boom
K-8 schools, college part of new Catholic network

Domino's Pizza founder Tom Monaghan, who has been a major donor to Catholic education, has opened a Catholic school network that now has four schools in Ann Arbor and Milan, both in Michigan. The schools are part of the Ave Maria Foundation's network of 28 Catholic schools, including four in Ann Arbor and Milan, and 16 in the United States.

The Ave Maria Foundation is a division of the Ave Maria Institute, a non-profit organization that promotes Catholic education. The foundation was founded in 1997 by Tom Monaghan, who is the largest shareholder of Domino's Pizza.

Monaghan believes that his foundation provides the means for Catholic educators to explore new pedagogical directions. "We want to work for God the rest of our lives," he said.

The Ave Maria Foundation has grown in both funding and scope of activity. In 1998, it underwrote the founding of Ave Maria College, a co-ed, four-year liberal arts institution located in the United States. The college offers degrees in the major fields of study, with nearly a dozen majors.

The foundation's network also includes the Ave Maria Academy, which was founded in 1997. The academy offers an educational program based on the catechism of the Catholic Church. The academy features strong academic instruction based on the catechism of the Catholic Church.

Students are enrolled worldwide, including 7,500 in the U.S. and over 30,000 in Canada. Michigan already has 40 Kumon Centers.

The Ave Maria Foundation funds Spiritus Sanctus Academy, a K-8 Catholic school run by an order of nuns. The Ann Arbor school pictured above captured a statewide architectural design award this year.

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The foundation, this feature encourages cooperative learning and mutual assistance between older and younger pupils. The Ave Maria Foundation also supports four other schools in the Ann Arbor area that use various teaching methods. Two of them are Shepard Montessori Schools in St. Clair and Ann Arbor, which opened in 1997.

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The problem of unprepared students builds confidence, and soon they are hooked. Many students are eager to learn more.
School defies its demographics
Low-income students meet principal’s high expectations in urban Detroit

An animated Emily Shahan leads her class of preppies in reading aloud a scumble of numbers, symbols and letters—a funny-looking shapes that literally are Greek.

"A gamma to the power of alpha, times gamma to the power of beta, divided by gamma to the power of alpha, equals . . . "They read off the chalkboard before them.

Shahan shuts off the recitation before any one can venture an answer, then tips her pen to explain how to solve the math problem.

"When you see multiple symbols, you add the exponents. When you see division symbols, you subtract the exponents," Adriana Reaves volunteers confidently—and correctly.

Adriana is 11. She and her fifth-grade classmates are studying algebra, a subject usually taught in high school, or perhaps in suburban middle schools or other advanced programs. But this is an elementary school, and it stands smack in the middle of urban desolation a couple of miles from downtown Detroit.

Requiring fourth- and fifth-graders to study algebra is the most dramatic example from downtown Detroit.

"I really suspect anybody who comes to this school because the outside doors are kept locked. It's not fair to test something that's not available. In many low-income schools, is also relatively low, though the school keeps no statistics.

Burks accomplishes all this with the same resources as similar Detroit schools. M.argent Horner, leader of the parent council, describes the experience of her three children at the school as "Fantastic. The teachers . . . expected more from students than did at the other schools my children attended. Other places they could try hard if you wanted to. Here, they make you try hard."

Seven Characteristics of Effective Schools

1. A safe and orderly environment
2. A climate of high expectations of every student
3. A principal who acts as an instructional leader
4. A staff with a clear educational mission
5. A priority on classroom instruction in essential skills
6. Parental involvement
7. Frequent testing to monitor student progress

MSU Professor Ronald Edmonds’ Seven Characteristics of Effective Schools

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Over the past two years, National Heritage Academy students have scored 3% above the national average on standardized tests. Other urban charter schools provide both choice and educational excellence throughout the state of Michigan.

We welcome your questions and comments.
As the father of three young children, I consider improving education to be one of my top priorities in the U.S. Senate. I believe that educational power and resources should be in the hands of parents, who help their kids with homework and encourage them to succeed, and the teachers, principals, and school boards who alone can make classrooms places of learning and growth. How do we do all of this to improve education for our children? We need to raise the quality of teachers—by providing resources for teacher professional development, teacher testing, and merit pay. We need to make sure that every Michigan student has access to a college education—by providing financial resources through tax incentives or scholarships programs. We also need to recognize that every community is different. A small district in rural Mecosta, Mich., has very different needs from a large urban district in Detroit. Local school districts need to have options regarding how to spend federal education dollars. Washington is finally starting to recognize this with the adoption of the Flexibility in Education Act, known as Ed-Flx. Ed-Flx is our attempt to free local schools from the burdens of the know-it-alls and the red tape in Washington. Ed-Flx gives every state a chance to waive the cumbersome rules, regulations, and red tape often associated with federal education programs. The state of Michigan participated in a demonstration project under Ed-Flx and, as a result of its tremendous success, the waivers are now available across the country.

This year, we went one step further and included as part of the Educational Opportunity and Improvement Act a volume demonstration program permitting up to 15 interested states and school districts to enter into an agreement with the U.S. Secretary of Education in which the states agree to specific academic improvement performance standards for their lowest performing students in return for the ability to consolidate federal funds and eliminate federal strings to better serve their lowest needing students.

We also need to recognize that qualified and dedicated teachers are an essential element in our goal to improve education. Teachers play a special and indispensable role in our children's education. Nothing can replace the positive influence and the support of a dedicated, knowledgeable teacher on a child's learning process. Accordingly, the educational opportunities act includes the teacher empowerment act (TEA), which provides federal incentives up to $2 billion to develop and implement innovative professional development and teacher quality programs. Because the states and districts have the control of these monies, each program will be specifically designed to address the needs of the individual states and communities by the people closest to the schools: the teachers, administrators, and parents.

During the debate on the Educational Opportunities Act, I introduced and passed an amendment that would have allowed states and districts to use their TEA funds to implement teacher testing, merit-based pay, and tenure reform programs. These programs will help schools and teachers better pinpoint areas in need of additional professional development and appropriately reward outstanding performance. I also supported a proposal that would have given states the power to design and implement programs to improve school safety. The Senate and Speaker of the House agreed to work to improve the bill and keep it in line with the goals of the new law.
School choice—reducing the political and financial barriers that prevent parents from choosing the best and safest schools for their children—may be the most divisive issue in the education debate. Advocates include many black parents with children falling in inner-city schools, religious groups, and proponents of greater parental freedom in education. Opponents include some civil rights groups, teachers, and education employees, and other public school organizations.

School choice legislation gives all落到 in failing schools to leave after three years with a $1,500 federal voucher to help them pay for enrollment in a new public or nonpublic school, or for educational aids.

"In the worst case, we will offer scholarships to America’s neediest children, allowing them to get the education they deserve," Bush told an audience in Los Angeles Sept. 9. "In any case, the federal government will no longer pay for their poor children." Bush offers vouchers, although before accepting the vice presidential nomination Sen. Joe Lieberman supported vouchers for students in the District of Columbia.

Both candidates propose charter schools, but differ on details. Bush would leverage $3 billion in federal funds to create 2,000 new charter schools. Gore would triple the number of charter schools by expanding existing programs.

Math and science education

Acknowledging that American students perform particularly poorly in math and science compared with students in other countries, both candidates favor federal initiatives to address the problem. Bush proposes to offer federal Pell grants to students who pass either Advanced Placement or college math and science courses while in high school. He would set aside $1 billion over 5 years to fund collaborations between colleges and states in math and science. He also favors having students tested in math every year in grades 5-8 and raising the maximum student loan forgiveness from $5,000 to $17,000 for those students graduating in engineering, technology, math, and the arts.

Gore calls for federal Pell grants of $1,000 to students who pass either Advanced Placement or college math and science courses while in high school. He would set aside $1 billion over 5 years to fund collaborations between colleges and states in math and science. He also favors having students tested in math every year in grades 5-8 and raising the maximum student loan forgiveness from $5,000 to $17,000 for those students graduating in engineering, technology, math, and the arts.

Gore calls for funding one million new teachers over the next 10 years, with emphasis on math such as math and science. He would forgive loans for 300,000 students who agree to teach math and science in "high-need" schools and other scarce subject areas. He also wants national math standards to be established for grades 4, 8, and 12.

Standards and accountability

Over the last 10 years, every state but Iowa has adopted standards in reading and math, and most states require students to be tested in reading and math and science. The movement for standards in measuring student progress and school accountability began at the federal level under President Bush and has continued ever since. Both candidates support the establishment of teacher tax deductions, including student loan forgiveness from $5,000 to $17,000 for those students graduating in engineering, technology, math, and the arts.

Bushalso calls for a $400 tax deduction to cover out-of-pocket teacher expenses. "Teachers are not the object of education. They are the engine of education reform. They have a high calling, and we must respect it," he told an audience in Milwaukee in March.

Gore would require states to ensure all teachers obtain credentials by 2004 or lose federal funding. He also proposes an $8 billion incentive program, which would give all teachers a $5,000 pay raise if their communities adopted tougher teacher standards. Beyond that he would give "master teachers" an additional $1,000. "We should pay teachers better. Many of our teachers do not get the support they need, and most accomplished teachers do not get the rewards they deserve," says the Gore Web site.

Will vouchers encourage the creation of radical schools?

With vouchers, there is nothing to prohibit such schools from opening.

Recently I read about a 1995 federal court case that addresses one part of the question of what happens when public funds are translated into support for private schools through vouchers. An African-American student attending a private school in Milwaukee—U-Niversity School—gave a speech on black separatism in her English class. The student criticized the school as racist and the school responded by suspending her and her parents the following year. She sued the school claiming she was being punished for statements constitutionally protected as free speech. She lost the case.

In the decision, Federal Judge Terrence Evans wrote, "It is an elementary principle of constitutional law that the protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private actors such as the U-Niversity School. Generally restrictions on constitutional rights that would be protected at a public high school...need not be honored at a private high school."

That's an impressive finding from a federal court in the context of trying to determine the impact of vouchers. Directly then, the message is that even in a circumstance where private schools are funded by publicly financed vouchers—as many are under Milwaukee's voucher system—the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights do not apply to the private school. Students in this all is more the message when you recognize that it is possible for the total budget of a private school to be funded with publicly financed vouchers.

There is nothing to prohibit the development of private Klu Klux Klan schools. There is nothing to prohibit the development of private sectarian religious schools.

There is nothing to prohibit the development of private home schools with narrowly exclusive agendas. And Amos of a voucher system in which voucher schools are not subject to constitutional protections, and private schools will admit and retain only those students they wish to admit and retain, and private schools don't have to meet any state achievement standards, and private schools are not required to provide any particular number of hours of teaching, and private schools do not have to report their work to the public, and private schools are governed by non-elected and publicly accountable boards, and private schools do not have to make their records available to the public—we certainly have the makings of a system in which voucher schools may exist to support "radical" or "fraudulent" schools. Isn't that a problem?

Don't we want diversity?

Diversity which includes unconstitutional behavior—whether created for that purpose or not—is a problem in a democratic society. U-naccountability is a problem in a democratic society. If an institution is not accountable to the Constitution nor to the public responsible for its funding, that institution easily can pursue an unaccountable to the Constitution nor to the public responsible for its funding, that institution easily can pursue an unaccountable agenda. And American history gives us examples of such private schools. Would providing public funds encourage such developments?

It certainly seems likely.

So, when we acknowledge that private schools are not subject to constitutional protections, and private schools do not have to meet any state achievement standards, and private schools are not required to provide any particular number of hours of teaching, and private schools do not have to report their work to the public, and private schools are governed by non-elected and publicly accountable boards, and private schools do not have to make their records available to the public—we certainly have the makings of a system in which voucher schools may exist to support "radical" or "fraudulent" schools. Isn't that a problem?

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