

MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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News and analysis for parents, educators and policymakers

Summer 2006



Ramell Morgan, left, and Nyrell Powell pose in their kindergarten 'graduation' caps and gowns. The two are now first graders at Sankofa Shule in Lansing. Please see page 6 for a look at this unique charter school and the woman who runs it.

A "TOTAL DISCONNECT" MEA staff salaries found to be considerably higher than teachers'

The average employee of the Michigan Education Association made almost \$21,000 more in 2005 than the average Michigan public teacher.

Some \$26.5 million in wages and salaries was paid out to 341 employees of the labor union, for an average salary of about \$77,750. The average teacher in Michigan earned about \$56,970 last year.

The union's East Lansing headquarters, 63 made more than \$57,000 last year, according to the LM-2. Of the union employees earning more than the average Michigan teacher, 36 made more than \$100,000 per year. The MEA's 133 Uniserv directors, who are located across the state and are paid to represent union members, earn an average of about \$87,000 per year.

Margaret Trimer-Hartley, director of communications for the union, said in an interview with Michigan Education Report that MEA employees know they make "good salaries," and that members approve the budget structure at annual representative assemblies.

Highest paid on the list was Lu Battaglieri, at \$181,902. He served as president during the period covered by the LM-2, but is now the MEA's executive director. Charles Anderson, who retired as executive director, made \$169,521. Iris Salters, the new MEA president, made \$139,904 as vice president. Also high on the pay scale are Arthur Przybylowicz, general counsel for the MEA, at \$174,761, and Allan Short, director of government affairs, who earned \$147,492.

Trimer-Hartley, at \$131,203, was just **MEA SALARIES, Page 3**

MEA Top Salaries 2004-05

Lu Battaglieri.....	\$181,902
Charles Anderson.....	\$169,521
Allan Short.....	\$147,492

*as reported to U.S. Dept. of Labor

The union's information comes from its latest disclosure form filed with the U.S. Department of Labor. The form, known as an LM-2, covers the period from Sept. 1, 2004 to Aug. 31, 2005. The average teacher salary comes from the National Education Association's fall 2005 "Rankings and Estimates: A Report of School Statistics." Michigan teachers rank fourth highest in the nation for average pay.

Of the MEA staffers who work at the

SHORT SUBJECTS

Several teachers unions, locals and other groups have abandoned MESSA recently, continuing a growing trend across Michigan. Administrators in Whitehall will receive annual 3 percent raises for three years, as well as health savings accounts, after switching health insurance plans. The Michigan Education Special Services Association is a third-party insurance administrator affiliated with the MEA. Teachers in the Forest Hills district will have to pay a portion of the costs starting next year if they choose to keep a more expensive MESSA plan. Bay City schools could trim \$4 million of a projected \$7.5 million deficit if all eight of the district's unions would switch to less expensive insurance. More than 100 employees in the Zeeland schools left MESSA in favor of the West Michigan Health Insurance Pool.

Violence continues to plague Detroit Public Schools, with more than 30 incidents of shootings, stabbings and robberies since classes began last August. Among the more serious crimes occurring on or near school grounds were the shooting of a janitor during an armed robbery and the alleged stabbing of two students by the mother of another student. Teachers have also been robbed inside schools. The district said it would spend \$600,000 to pay laid-off city police officers to work in the schools, and a group of ministers is trying to recruit 2,000 volunteers to beef up the district's security force.

Central Michigan University reports that it has saved about \$5 million since 2003 by dropping MESSA.

SHORT SUBJECTS, Page 8

Mandatory expenditure increase faces uphill battle

The Michigan Chamber of Commerce and a host of statewide organizations are opposing a movement that demands annual inflationary increases in the school aid budget.

Groups that support the mandatory increases collected about 300,000 petition signatures and say they want the Legislature to vote to mandate that funding for schools would increase by the rate of inflation each year. If legislators do not act on the demand, and enough signatures are found to be valid, the issue will be on a statewide ballot this November.

Professional groups representing townships, counties, law enforcement, home builders and real estate agents have joined with the state chamber and local chambers of commerce to point out what they see as serious flaws with the proposal.

Even groups that had been thought to be supporters of the plan seem to be backing away from it. The Michigan Association of Community Colleges recently told a House appropriations subcommittee that the group was neutral on the issue, and none of the presidents of Michigan's 15 public universities have offered support for it.

The Michigan Chamber of Commerce has adopted a 16-point issue paper titled "Why It's Wrong for Michigan." Cost is a chief concern for the groups. The non-partisan House Fiscal Agency estimates that mandatory funding increases would cost taxpayers an additional \$1.1 billion in the first year alone. That amount would be on top of the more than \$12 billion in state

taxes already spent on public education. A recent National Education Association survey showed Michigan ranked eighth in the country in education spending, at more than \$19 billion including state, federal and local sources.

If that much money were to be culled from other parts of Michigan's budget, opponents wonder what other public services would be affected. The Chamber points out there may not be enough money to fund critical needs such as police officers, fire fighters, corrections officers and other public safety functions.

A February opinion poll conducted **SCHOOL FUNDING, Page 2**

COMPETITIVE CONTRACTING CONTINUES

Pensions, healthcare eat away at education dollars

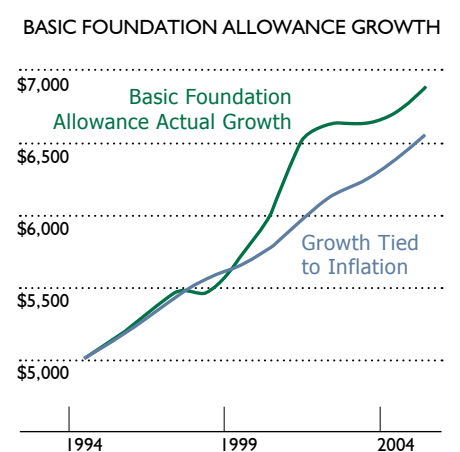
Every week brings new cost-saving developments from around Michigan as public schools try to direct more money to the classroom and protect teachers' jobs by outsourcing non-instructional services.

"I think you're going to see this happen more and more," according to Lisa Brewer, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Association of School Business Officials, a professional association of school financial administrators. "It's been going on for a while now, but it seems people are more aware of it."

A biennial study by Michigan Privatization Report, a publication of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, shows more than one-third of public schools in Michigan now privatize at least one service.

PRIVATIZATION, Page 2

Education at a Glance



The top line shows the increase in the Basic Foundation Allowance approved yearly by the Legislature. The bottom line shows what the growth would have been if equal to the Consumer Price Index.

Source: Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency

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Privatization

continued from Page 1

That figure has steadily risen, from 31 percent in 2001 to 34 percent in 2003 and 35.5 percent in 2005.

The most common services privatized by schools are janitorial, food service and busing. Some school districts, however, are starting to look at other operations in which costs can be cut. With large increases each year in the state-run pension system for school employees and high-cost health insurance plans, districts are becoming more creative.

Ithaca Public Schools, for example, privately contracts for psychological services, a move that has reduced costs by \$32,000 a year, compared to what the school was paying the Gratiot County Intermediate School District. Lakeview Public Schools, in suburban Detroit, is spending \$1 million less on operations and maintenance after privatizing its custodial work. The decrease takes into account money not spent on increased wages and benefits, inflationary costs and equipment and supplies.

"We are starting to see this approach in a number of different ways," Brewer said. "Administrators and school board members are focused on how to get the best value out of whatever service they're looking for."

Among the most creative approaches to privatization is a plan to contract out for the jobs of three top administrators in the Ypsilanti Public Schools. The positions of chief financial officer, director of human resources and superintendent were being considered for just such a move, which the district said would reduce annual costs by about \$130,000.

Over the past year, schools have reduced expenses by as much as \$250,000, as was the case in Albion when that district privatized custodial services. In Grosse Pointe, a potential \$50,000 loss was turned into \$90,000 of revenue when food services were privatized.

Cooperative approaches also are being pursued. The Muskegon Area ISD is

investigating privatized busing for six local districts that could reduce costs by up to \$280,000. Ypsilanti and neighboring districts Willow Run and Lincoln have also joined in an effort to investigate cost reductions through privatized busing.

Lincoln Consolidated Schools Superintendent Fred Williams told The Ann Arbor News that his district spends \$60,000 a year on each of its 65 buses, and that one private company said they could do it for \$40,000 per bus each year.

As Ypsilanti, Lincoln and Willow Run discussed potential savings through privatized busing, the issue of job losses again came up. John Fulton, Ypsilanti's

director of human resources, told The News that such fears were unfounded.

"If they take over three districts, they need to hire drivers," Fulton said. "So they're going to be looking at the three districts to hire the best drivers."

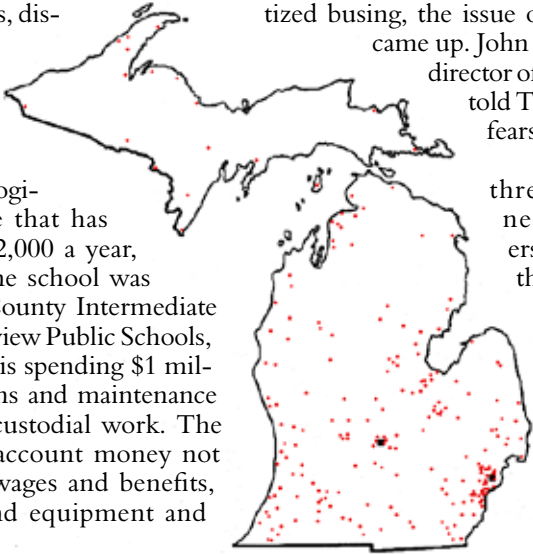
When considering such a decision, schools can look to the success of Pinckney for direction. Pinckney Community Schools privatized its busing operations in

1994 and, according to The Ann Arbor News, has renewed the contract four times. Linda Moskalik, assistant superintendent for finance, said the contract will be renewed again this year.

Union activists say privatization puts custodians and bus drivers out of work, although in Pinckney's case, 90 percent of the drivers went to work for Laidlaw Transit, all at the same hourly pay rate the district was paying.

Aside from the revenue of selling its buses to Laidlaw, Pinckney no longer must deal with the expenses of union negotiations or grievances from transportation staff.

"We're saving a lot of administrative work," Moskalik told The News. ♦



Each dot on the map above represents one of the nearly 180 school districts that have privatized at least one non-instructional service.

School Funding

continued from Page 1

by a Lansing firm found 56 percent of Michigan's likely voters approve of the funding mandates, but the number drops to just 39 percent support when put in the context that it might require cuts in police and fire protection or tax hikes.

While those who support the mandate often say the state should "fully fund education," the Chamber points out that between 1994 and 2004, spending on public schools increased 43 percent. Enrollment went up just 5 percent during the same time period.

"It's an incredibly selfish, one-sided proposal," according to Rich Studley of the Chamber.

Backers say it will improve Michigan's future.

"Providing adequate funding for public schools, community colleges and universities will position Michigan for good paying jobs," Tom White, a spokesman for funding backers, testified before the House Education Committee.

If the funding increase is approved, there would be no requirement that the money be tied to student achievement or educational quality.

There is even disagreement among public school officials that a funding problem exists. Sharron Norman, school improvement director for Lansing Public Schools, told the Lansing State Journal that a 20 percentage point increase in fourth grade MEAP language arts scores over the past three years can be attributed to in-depth teacher training and sufficient funding.

The Chamber also has accused the people claiming an increase is needed of inconsistency. Writing for Michigan Education Report last fall, Chamber President

Jim Barrett pointed out that education leaders in 2002 were opposed to earmarking tobacco settlement money and lobbied against Proposal 4, which would have earmarked millions of dollars specifically for health care programs and projects. Barrett wrote that the Michigan Federation of Teachers urged their members to vote no on Proposal 4 because, "it would allow the new legislature no flexibility in dealing with the state's budgetary crisis and would make it impossible to adjust these priorities in the years ahead based on changing needs or circumstances."

Similarly, the Chamber believes that this year's funding mandate would undermine legislative oversight and weaken the role of the governor. If passed, the mandate would establish the only portion of state government with a constitutional demand for higher spending every year. Earmarking an ever-increasing amount of money for one part of the state budget would remove those dollars from annual review and control, while at the same time limiting the governor's constitutional requirement to begin the budget process by submitting proposed expenditures to the Legislature.

The large, mandated increase would reward shrinking districts, rather than encouraging them to be more efficient or to improve educational quality to attract students, while also penalizing growing districts. Money that could be used for districts with growing enrollment will instead go to subsidize smaller schools. Other details of the proposal, such as averaging enrollment figures over three years and shifting responsibility for part of the school employee pension contributions have yet to be fully discussed. A Senate Fiscal Agency report estimates the pension aspect could increase the state's spending by more than \$300 million a year. ♦

Spending doubles in 30 years Education expert dispels money myth

America has doubled the amount it spends on public education over the last 30 years with negligible increases in student performance, according to a noted scholar and researcher.

Professor Jay P. Greene, chairman of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, recently discussed his book, "Education Myths: What Special Interest Groups Want You To Believe About Our Schools And Why It Isn't So," at a February Issues & Ideas luncheon in Lansing attended by educators, business owners and policymakers.

"There is a centrality of belief, the myth that the current problems in education are due to a lack of funding," Greene said. "Don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with having more money. As a general rule it's better to have more money than less money. But the evidence tells us there is no good relationship between additional resources and student achievement."

Greene joked that even National Public Radio accepts an "advertisement" from a foundation that says it served underfunded city schools.

"How do we know they're underfunded?" Greene asked. "People buy into the myth because they have no idea how much we actually spend."

Greene said figures from the U.S. Department of Education show that American taxpayers spend about \$10,000 per pupil per year on K-12 public education. With 50 million students nationwide, that amounts to roughly \$500 billion a year.

"The president's national defense budget proposal for next year is about \$439 billion," Greene said. "There may be some supplemental money for Iraq, about \$50 billion, but basically we spend more on education than we do on national defense, even in wartime."

Greene said another way to think of

such a large amount of money is to consider that it is more than the entire value of goods and services produced in Russia each year when converted into U.S. dollars.

"No matter how you look at it, it's a lot more than we used to spend," Greene said. "Adjusted for inflation, we have doubled the amount spent on public education in the last 30 years."

What has the additional spending gotten us, Greene asks?

"Basically there has been no change in student skills during that time."

High school seniors, who are the end result of the process, show statistically insignificant increases on the National Assessment for Educational Progress. Greene calls the NAEP the best long-term gauge for studying student performance.

"Any industry that would spend twice as much money and not produce any more would be out of business," Greene said. "Normally, in industry, the pattern is to spend less and produce more. We have a productivity crisis in education."

Greene did say the NAEP results are flat, rather than down, which is a good sign.

"That can be reassuring, but only slightly reassuring," he said. "Because while we have stayed flat, everyone else has moved up."

Greene said other industrialized countries that used to lag the U.S. have surpassed us, while even non-industrialized nations – he used China and India as examples – have begun to catch up.

Greene briefly mentioned another myth addressed in his book while talking about the lack of increase or decrease in student performance.

"People say kids are dumber now and education was much more rigorous 'when I was a kid,' but that's simply not the case," he noted. ♦

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Charter school property could sell

A Lansing-area charter school is caught between competing pieces of proposed legislation. Senate Bill 940, introduced by former Sen. Virg Bernero, who is now the mayor of Lansing, would convey the site of the former Michigan School for the Blind to the city of Lansing for fair market value. Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy, a K-8 public school academy, now leases part of the property. House Bill 5354, introduced by Rep. Michael Murphy, D-Lansing, would also allow the property to be sold at fair market value, but would require the state Department of Management and Budget to first offer the property to the charter school. Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy would have 180 days to decide whether or not to purchase the property. HB 5354 would set fair market value at an amount equal to the average of three separate appraisals done by three independent appraisers. Murphy's bill says the first 5 percent of net revenue from the sale, or \$50,000, whichever is less, would go toward the Newline for the Blind Fund. Another 5 percent or \$50,000, whichever is less, would go toward the Michigan School for the Blind Trust Fund to support Camp Tuhsmehta in Greenville, with the balance would go to the state's General Fund. HB 5354 was referred to the House Committee on Regulatory Reform. SB 940 was referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2005-HB-5354

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SB-940

Drug guidelines in schools

House Bill 5696, introduced by Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, would require public schools to formulate guidelines concerning behavioral issues and psychotropic medications, such as Ritalin, for students. The bill would allow school personnel to discuss behavior problems with parents, refer students for educational and health evaluations with parental consent and take steps to provide special education services. Schools would also have to

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

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implement a policy regarding psychotropic medication that is consistent with existing state policy. The bill was referred to the House Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-5696

Sinking fund expansion

Legislation in the state House could expand the ways in which school districts are able to spend sinking fund tax dollars. House Bill 5709 would allow money sinking fund tax dollars to be used for purchasing school buses, or for the purchase, installation or equipping of school buildings with technology. Schools would not be able to use the money to pay for diskettes, compact discs, videotapes, training, consulting, maintenance or software support. They would, however, be allowed to use the funds for hardware or communications devices used for pupil instruction. Current law restricts sinking fund money to the purchase of land and the construction or repair of school buildings. The bill was referred to the House Education Committee.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-5709

Bullying ban

Almost four dozen state representatives have co-sponsored a bill that would require schools to adopt a policy against harassment and bullying. House Bill 5616, now before the House Education Committee, requires the policy to be adopted with input from parents, school employees, students and administrators. The policy would also have to define what constitutes bullying, as well as identifying consequences for offenders.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-5616

MEAP confusion

House Bill 5635 is a one-sentence bill that would require the Department of Education to work with school districts and the federal government in case of dis-

tribution or logistical problems with the MEAP test or other assessment tests that are beyond the control of local districts to ensure schools and or students are not penalized. The proposed legislation aims to protect districts from being held accountable if paperwork is filed late due to a delay caused by a third party, such as a company hired to administer and score tests. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Education.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-5635

Mandatory volunteerism

House Bill 4278 would allow parents to appeal a school district's interpretation of "community service" in those districts where such mandatory volunteerism is a requirement for high school graduation. The bill passed 60-43 in the House on Feb. 21 and is now before the Senate Education Committee. HB 4278 does not, however, require a school board to do anything other than to hear the appeal.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-4278

Reading certification

A bill passed unanimously in the Senate and by an overwhelming majority in the House would require newly trained elementary school teachers to have additional training in reading instruction. Senate Bill 327 would increase the number of hours of continuing education in order for a teacher to become certified. The additional training would have to come during a teacher's first six years of classroom employment and would focus on the diagnosis and remediation of reading disabilities. The bill is awaiting Gov. Jennifer Granholm's signature.

www.michiganvotes.org/2005-SB-327

College classes for high schoolers

Two bills introduced recently in the Michigan House could extend and expand some opportunities for high

school students to take college-level courses. House Bill 5282 would eliminate the June 30, 2006 sunset currently in place for the Career and Technical Preparation Act. The act, passed in 2001, allows high school students to enroll at post secondary institutions and take courses or programs that teach a trade, occupation or a vocation. In either instance, the student's home school district pays the cost of the courses using a pro-rated portion of that student's state foundation grant. House Bill 5903 would allow high school juniors and seniors to enroll full-time in a state college, university or community college if they meet specific criteria. Eligible students must be at least 15 years old and have completed at least one-half of the necessary requirements for high school graduation, or score in the top 20 percent of a nationally-recognized college admissions exam. The bill would also require the student to be admitted to a college or university and enrolled full-time. The state would then pay a percentage of the student's college costs out of that student's foundation grant. Students must maintain a 2.0 grade point average to remain eligible, and would receive a high school diploma if they are awarded an associate's degree or completes four full-time college semesters.

www.michiganvotes.org/2005-HB-5282

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-5903

Books for non-students

Senate Bill 1174 would spend up to \$1 million to give schools grants to purchase books for children not enrolled in school. The grants, available through a competitive process to conventional and intermediate school districts, would be used to buy one book every month for children from birth through age 5. A matching grant of local money is required to receive the tax dollars.

www.michiganvotes.org/2006-SB-1174 ♦

MEA Salaries

continued from Page 1

behind Jolene Kelly, director of finance, at \$134,153, and Thomas Ferris, one of three people the LM-2 identified as the MEA's director of human resources, at \$134,144. Robin Langley, also listed as director of human resources, made \$134,864, while Thomas Baird, another employee listed as director of human resources, made \$126,282.

Some educators, however, do not feel that dues money should go toward funding such a large operation.

"It's a tough pill to swallow," said Heather Reams, director of communications for the Association of American Educators. "It's really a slap in the face to teachers, when union staffers make two and three times as much money."

The MEA, however, defends its operation.

"We work hard to give our members their money's worth," Trimer-Hartley said. "They value the service this organization provides."

Chris Card, a 13-year teaching veteran in Webberville, said he thinks there is a "total disconnect" between what teachers make and what MEA staffers are paid. (See related story, page 4).

"I can't see how they can even relate to us," said Card, who resigned from the MEA last fall. "We have a kid who comes to us and can't go on a field trip, we take the money from our own pocket and make it happen."

"But they're living a whole different lifestyle off what they're pocketing from our dues," Card said about the

amount paid to union staff. "They're in a whole different place. How can they represent us?"

When asked how teachers and support personnel learn about the salary and budget process in order to vote, Trimer-Hartley said the union has an "elaborate, extensive structure" by which it provides information. Teachers must pay about \$570 a year in dues to the MEA to fund that structure, while support personnel must pay half that amount. A part of that money is then sent to the National Education Association.

"It's difficult to see a portion of your salary go to dues," Trimer-Hartley said. "But until they were increased, they were frozen for six years."

In a February 2003 memo, the MEA told members a dues increase was necessary to erase a budget deficit caused by a drop in pension assets, a decrease in investment revenue and an increase in the retirement fund liability for MEA employees.

The MEA's investments earned \$1 million interest last year, according to the 2005 LM-2. Sale of investments and assets brought in another \$2.6 million. Of the union's \$123.8 million in total receipts, \$64 million was from dues and fees. In addition to staff salaries, however, the MEA also paid out \$1.5 million in deferred compensation and \$2.5 million in prepaid retirement costs for its own employees. These amounts were not broken down by individual recipient.


"It takes a decent salary and decent benefits for us to be competitive and get the best and the brightest," Trimer-Hartley said.

A new dues structure, one based on taking a percentage of what teachers and support staff earn, could be implemented this fall. Trimer-Hartley said no dollar amount has been set as a threshold for what the MEA will collect under the new system, but a cap will be in place for the maximum amount members must pay.

"We aren't operating a savings and loan," Trimer-Hartley said. "We will only take in what we need to meet the services we are expected to deliver."

Other information gleaned from the union's LM-2 show the MEA has \$58.9 million in assets, including \$29.7 million in cash. ♦

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Veteran teacher changes professional focus

Cites objection to union political involvement

When Chris Card began his teaching career 13 years ago, no one ever told him he wasn't required to belong to the Michigan Education Association.

"If I had known then what I know now, as the saying goes," Card said from his classroom at Webberville High School, east of Lansing. "As a new teacher coming out of college, they just sign you up. No one tells you your options."

Those options, under state and federal law, include *not* joining a teachers union. Card said he was never told that.

"I had to do all this research on my own," he said. "I did a lot of digging. It wasn't until last year that I fully understood it."

Card began his career as a music teacher in Cadillac, where he spent seven years. It was there, during the 1998 gubernatorial campaign, that Card began to question the Michigan Education Association's activities.

"They were backing Geoffrey Feiger for governor, and I'm thinking 'this is my union?'" Card said. "They are so far away from the grassroots teachers in the classrooms."

He then taught in Byron Center for three years, where he was classified as a "fee payer." Under such status, he did not pay dues to the National Education Association, and only had to pay the portion of his MEA dues that the union could show went toward collective bargaining.

"That's where it really matters," he said. "The local does the negotiating, our salaries, benefits; that's the kind of thing unions are for, not all the political stuff."

Now, as a religious objector, Card pays the full amount of MEA and NEA dues combined, but it goes instead to a charity.

"This isn't about money," he said. "I'm not doing this to buck the system. I pay more now than I paid under fee status, but it goes to a local food bank, and I'm so glad they get that money now. I'm really happy for them."

According to the MEA's Web site, the combined MEA-NEA dues for an individual teacher are about \$570 per year.

Card makes it clear that he does not



Chris Card, music teacher at Webberville High School, resigned from the Michigan Education Association, citing a religious objection.

have a problem with his local union. He remains a member of the local and pays dues to support it.

"That's where it really matters," he said. "The local does the negotiating, our salaries, benefits; that's the kind of thing unions are for, not all the political stuff."

Card said he even applied to be part of the local's negotiating team next year.

"We'll see how that goes," he laughs. "That will be an interesting election."

Card said he cannot "in good conscience" pay money that he believes the state and national unions use for causes to which he objects on moral grounds.

"The MEA and NEA make me sick," Card said bluntly. "I finally decided to take a public stand."

At a hearing last fall, Card had to show that his religious objector stand was at odds with MEA membership.

"Their representative tried to portray me as being very narrow minded," Card said. "She said the Bible doesn't say any-

thing about my faith not allowing me to be in a union. But I said it does mention that I have to worry about who I associate with."

Card said the MEA/NEA has a "strong liberal agenda" that he thinks does not fairly represent teachers, nor does it have much to do with education.

"When they (the unions) get involved in all these political issues, how does that benefit kids?" Card said. "The stuff I've seen the MEA push for has nothing to do with teaching."

The months since his victory have been difficult, but Card does not regret his decision.

"The union has filed two grievances against me, both of which were found to be without cause," he said. "They even wanted to reduce my salary. Have you ever heard of a union wanting to reduce a teacher's salary?"

Card said some fellow staff members refuse to speak to him, months later, no matter how cordial he is to them.

"It's really petty," he said. "But you can't pin down exactly why. You can't go to them and ask why they behave this way. I just have to hope they respect my rights as I respect theirs."

"When they (the unions) get involved in all these political issues, how does that benefit kids?" Card said.

Card is in his second year at Webberville, which means he will be eligible for tenure at the end of the year. Tenure is not transferable between school districts. He admits this made his decision more complicated.

"I'm totally vulnerable," he said. "It was a real risk, but now it's all about my performance. That's what it should hinge on. I've never received a poor evaluation."

Card said a few other teachers have approached him in private, asking about his research into the issue. About 680 teachers in Michigan have "fee payer" status, which was Card's first move in severing ties to the union.

"This may not be right for everyone," he said. "But I would do it again in a minute. For me it's the right thing. I don't necessarily disagree with being in a union, but where people have rights not to be, they should be allowed to exercise those rights." ♦

Educators association offers union alternative

Teachers who feel they are not properly being represented by the Michigan Education Association do have an alternative.

The Association of American Educators, a professional association with members in all 50 states, offers teachers access to insurance, career development and industry information without worrying about what it calls "the partisan politics of bargaining or labor unions."

"Teachers who join us do so for a vast number of reasons," says Heather Reams, director of communications for AAE. "But they almost always tell us the same thing. They're glad there's an alternative."

Reams said teachers who do not wish to belong to labor union mention factors such as moral issues, political issues or just the fact they do not appreciate lacking alternatives in what they support.

"Many times, people are frustrated because their union is supporting causes that they are against," Reams said. "They don't have a voice and they feel like other people are making choices for them."

Reams pointed to a January editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* that caught the eye of teachers nationwide. The *Journal* detailed how the National Education Association had given \$65 million in 2005 to political groups that have little to do with education, such as Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, the Fund to Protect Social Security and the National Women's Law Center.

NEA President Reg Weaver made \$439,000 according to the union's LM-2 report, while an annual payroll of \$58 million for 600 employees included more than 300 making over \$100,000. That is in stark comparison to the national average of \$48,000 a year for teachers.

"What wasn't clear before is how much of a part the teachers unions play in the wider liberal movement and the Democratic Party," said Mike Antonucci of the Education Intelligence Agency, according to *The Journal*. "They're like some philanthropic organization that passes out grant money to interest groups."

Reams says that issue is a high priority for teachers who call the AAE.

"The NEA's LM-2 points out that they really don't fairly represent their members," she said. "When 40 percent of teachers identify themselves as Republican, and they're giving all that money to left wing causes, it makes you wonder where the balance is."

Reams said the recent announcement that the NEA will partner with the AFL-CIO also has many teachers concerned.

"A lot of teachers are upset because they don't think of themselves as union members," she said. "Even though the Teamsters pulled out, people are asking themselves 'what am I, a teacher or a Teamster?' and it can be very confusing."

The AAE's Web site, aaeteachers.org, spells out that the association does not get involved in partisan politics or the non-educational agendas that labor unions often pursue.

"We do not use our dues for any political or social agendas," Reams said. "We don't want to offend our members by doing that."

Reams said dues for the AAE are \$150 a year. The MEA takes about \$570 from teachers, while teachers in other states pay hundreds more.

For teachers who may want to leave their union, the ability to access various types of insurance is often a concern.

"We can provide the insurance that makes teachers feel safe to leave their union," Reams said. "Those are the things they really care about."

Insurance plans for liability, health, disability and autos also are available through the AAE. ♦



CLIP AND SAVE

How to resign your union membership

Union membership is not required by Michigan law. Most collective bargaining contracts require members to resign from the union only during a specified time period, usually August. If you are interested in resigning from your union, make sure to check the exact requirements of your current contract.

The following steps should be followed if you wish to become a nonunion employee – at no risk of losing your job – and become what is commonly known as a "fee payer."

1. Draft a letter of resignation revoking any authorization for payroll deduction of membership dues and authorize only those fees legally chargeable for collective bargaining purposes.
2. Make three copies of the letter and mail the original, by certified mail (with signature requested) to your union.
3. Mail one copy to your district's superintendent.
4. Keep one copy for your records.

If you encounter any difficulty in this process, you may contact the Michigan Employment Relations Commission at (313) 256-3540. You may also want to consult the National Right to Work Legal Foundation, www.nrtw.org, or contact the Labor Policy Initiative at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, www.mackinac.org.

If you wish to resign from your union for religious objector reasons, you may do so at any time during the year, although a formal hearing will be held. Contact Landmark Legal Foundation at www.llf.org for more information on that process.

Graduation requirements in place *State-mandated curriculum approved*

High school students will need to complete a more thorough, state-mandated set of credits in order to graduate from high school, now that a much-anticipated plan has become law.

Debate about the need for more state graduation requirements began last fall, with much concern expressed that currently, the only required class for high school graduation is civics. That will change, however in the fall of 2007.

The House and Senate each passed bills that contained the bulk of the original plan approved by the state Board of Education. A conference committee worked out the finer details, such as when it would start and which specific subjects would be required. That process lasted most of the month of March and was finally signed into law by Gov. Jennifer Granholm on April 20.

"If Michigan is to compete in a global economy, we must have the best educated workforce in the nation to attract jobs and investment to our state," Granholm said at the bill signing. "This new challenging curriculum will help ensure that every student in Michigan is prepared for college or technical training when they finish high school."

The requirements include four years each of English and math (including algebra I, algebra II and geometry), three years each of social studies and science (including biology and chemistry or physics), one year each of fine arts and physical fitness and one on-line course. The Department of Education is to develop content expectations for each subject, and the requirements will begin with the class of 2011. Beginning with the class of 2016, students must take two years of a foreign language, but that can occur any time between kindergarten and 12th grade.

Students may test out of any of the required classes, and may enroll in an alternative math class if algebra II proves too difficult.

During debate on the floor of both the House and Senate, a number of amendments were offered, most of which failed. Among them were calls to increase the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18, a proposal to allow districts to phase the plan in, and a requirement for civilizations from each continent and certain kingdoms from Africa be studied in a world history course.

The issue was first addressed last December, when state Superintendent Mike Flanagan presented a 16-credit plan to the State Board of Education. The board approved it, with the addition of two credits in a foreign language.

The Senate Education Committee held a series of hearings around the state in February and March, gathering input on how the new requirements would affect parents, students, teachers and administrators.

Concern was raised in three areas, primarily focusing on how a state-mandated curriculum would affect vocational education, alternative schools and how schools would pay for the increased demands, especially for qualified teachers in the higher level math and science classes.

David King, an industrial arts education teacher and small business owner from Merrill, spoke before a Senate Education Committee public hearing at the Midland Education Services Agency building. He suggested that industrial arts be included in the larger scope of "arts" because it, too, allows for the teaching of math and science.

"We expect to find people who can repair our car or build a house, but you have to give students the chance to learn those things," King said. "Those are jobs that can't be outsourced."

Alternative education supporters said they were afraid the stricter requirements would increase the drop-out rate as students became frustrated with having to take high level courses.

"There are several risk factors involved with why kids end up in alternative education," said Terry Kaiser of Windover High School, an alternative school chartered by Midland Public Schools. "Most of the kids who come to us have lower elementary school math levels."

Carolyn Weirda, superintendent of Bay City Public Schools, said the measures would increase her district's costs by millions of dollars due to the need for more specialized teachers. She also feared that if the district did not implement the changes quickly enough, Bay City could lose students to other districts that adapt more quickly. Weirda said she would prefer to see the requirements begin in seventh grade, and give students five years to take the mandated classes, thus allowing more time for electives and other technical career studies. ♦

AGREE TO DISAGREE *School issues make up half of state's labor complaints*

Issues affecting public school districts account for about half of the work done by the Michigan Bureau of Employment Relations, including hearings on unfair labor practice complaints and fact finding by mediators.

"School issues seem to be more prevalent because the labor situation in school districts is that they usually can't settle it on their own," says Ruthanne Okun, director of the MBER. "We also see a lot coming from municipalities, because they're facing the same legacy issues as schools."

Legacy issues, Okun says, include salary, health insurance and retirement costs.

A sub-agency of the cabinet-level Department of Consumer and Industry Services, the MBER handles two specific items that are commonplace among schools, especially those experiencing contract negotiation difficulties. The first is what is known as an unfair labor practice complaint, usually pertaining to activities of one or both sides during bargaining, the second a fact finding process that applies directly to the contract in question.

The Michigan Public Employment Relations Act was passed in 1947, marking the first time public sector employees, such as teachers, were allowed to organize. Modeled after the National Labor Relations Act, PERA issues are decided by the Michigan

Employment Relations Commission. Both the state and federal laws allow for both sides to file unfair labor practice charges.

Historically, labor complaints have been associated closely with employees and unions, although that tide could be shifting.

"We typically receive between 300 and 400 ULP complaints per year," Okun said. "It definitely seems as though school boards are filing more often because of their financial situations. They are the ones looking for cost reductions and have ultimate responsibility for how the money is spent."

ULPs have been filed by both sides in Holland, where a contract fight has garnered statewide attention.

According to the Holland Sentinel, both the school board and teachers union have filed multiple complaints against the other, as negotiations focus primarily on containing health insurance costs. The decision, however, for a school board to take such a step against its employees is not taken lightly.

"When we first started this whole process, we were warned by our attorney that we would see this happen," Frank Garcia, superintendent for Holland Public Schools told Michigan Education Report, "We were hesitant to follow suit, but some things that occurred were completely out of line."

Health insurance changes occurring statewide *Savings mean more money for teachers, students*

Public school employees around the state are experiencing significant changes to health insurance plans, either by their own choice or board action, as districts fight to contain skyrocketing costs.

Two school districts on opposite sides of the state drew attention last year after both declared their respective contract talks were at an impasse and implemented new health insurance measures. Both Holland Public Schools and St. Clair Shores Lakeview Public Schools dropped the Michigan Education Special Services Association, a third-party administrator affiliated with the Michigan Education Association, in favor of less expensive plans for providing health benefits.

By dealing directly with insurance companies, schools can reduce costs by thousands of dollars per employee. Lakeview expects to save \$500,000 a year with the switch. A typical MESSA package can top \$16,000 a year per teacher. Many districts, such as Holland, have argued for monthly caps in contract negotiations that would equal \$12,000 to \$13,000 a year per employee. A Kaiser Family Foundation study shows the average cost of health insurance nationwide is about \$10,880 per family.

"A lot of schools are starting to go away from MESSA," says Holland Superintendent Frank Garcia. "We were one of the first to take a stand on health care costs."

MESSA is a large part of ongoing contract struggles for Ironwood Public Schools in the Upper Peninsula. Health insurance expenditures there have more than doubled in the last five years and now cost taxpayers over \$16,000 a year per teacher. Other districts report 15 percent annual increases.

The Ironwood Daily Globe quoted a brief filed by the Ironwood school district with the Michigan Employment Relations Commission as stating, "Statewide, school districts are frustrated with the MEA's refusal to negotiate cost containment and are declaring impasse and unilaterally instituting employee contributions."

Also frustrating for schools is MESSA's refusal to disclose aggregate claims data to individual districts. This hampers school boards two ways. First, they have trouble seeking competitive bids from other health insurance providers because there is no claims data history for other bidders to use in comparison. Secondly, without obtaining other insurance bids, the district cannot present that information during collective bargaining sessions with employee unions.

The Holland Sentinel reported that the district filed one ULP against the union because of a press conference the union held on the steps of city hall.

"They made known a proposal they were going to bring to the negotiating table the following night," Garcia said. "We felt that was a breach of an agreement not to negotiate in public."

The Sentinel also reported the district filed a ULP over a union proposal the district felt would have increased costs, something known as "regressive bargaining."

The Holland Education Association filed ULPs of its own against the school district, based on a letter the school board sent to individual teachers that outlined contract issues, and over a claim that the union did not receive financial information it had requested.

"I'm not sure what the trend is around the state with school boards doing this," Garcia said. "I know our board hesitated. We were very cautious not to jump at the first opportunity."

The issues over which a ULP can be filed are sometimes confusing. Lakeview Public Schools, in metro Detroit, declared an impasse in contract negotiations and instituted a new health insurance plan,

A package of bills in the Legislature could change how schools handle health care insurance for teachers and other employees by allowing districts to pool together and self-insure employees. The plan has been estimated to reduce costs by hundreds of millions of dollars, which schools in turn could spend on higher teacher salaries, hiring more teachers, buying new textbooks or investing in infrastructure.

A pilot program for just such an approach is being used in Ottawa and Kent counties. Known as the West Michigan Health Insurance Pool, it serves 11 school districts and covers more than 1,000 employees, although none are teachers. Participating districts have said it will reduce costs by as much as 10 percent yearly.

The changes are beginning to have a ripple effect statewide, as teachers voluntarily move away from MESSA in exchange for other benefits.

Teachers in the Pinckney schools, for example, voted 97 percent in favor of dropping the MEA's MESSA in order to save jobs. The change will reduce costs by about \$800,000, which the district said would be enough to maintain current staffing levels for the next school year.

In the Bay City Public Schools, all employee unions except the teachers agreed to open their contracts this year and switch insurance plans, moving from MESSA Super Care I to a less costly MESSA PPO. The move reduced costs by about \$190,000. Contracts between the schools and all eight employee unions are up for negotiation this summer, and officials said they could slash \$4 million of a projected \$7.5 million budget deficit if all employees would abandon MESSA completely in favor of a less expensive plan with equal coverage.

Other districts are settling contracts by giving teachers a choice between the MESSA plans. Those who chose to keep the more expensive Super Care I must pay the difference between it and the PPO, which the schools say they can afford to provide at no cost to employees.

"It comes down to financial stability and survival," Garcia said. "Our board is committed to the community, to our students and to our programs. Our two heaviest burdens are retirement costs and health care, but we still need to maintain a financially viable district." ♦

also giving teachers a raise, which in turn prompted the union to file a ULP. In denying an injunction to stop the new insurance plan from being instituted, a Macomb County Circuit Court judge said the union had failed to show it was negatively affected by what the district had implemented, meaning a pay raise is generally not considered a negative thing. The issue, however, is that the pay raise was given outside the process of collective bargaining.

"I've been here eight years and I've never seen a decision that would end up taking money away that had already been paid," Okun said about the Lakeview situation. "The decisions aren't made in a vacuum, so they should be practical for both parties."

Aside from the labor complaints, MERC also oversees requests for fact finding and mediation, wherein the school board and teachers union agree to present their cases to a neutral third party. This occurs after both sides agree that contract talks have reached an impasse.

"We're seeing this more and more," Okun said. "Our hope is to place the sides back in a position whereby an unfair labor practice never would have occurred." ♦

TEACHER FOCUS

Maxine Hankins Cain

“You have to be a one-woman army”

Long-time educator praises parental choice

After working in public schools for more than three decades, Maxine Hankins Cain pays a Lansing-area public charter school her greatest compliment.

“I have three grown sons, but if they were of age, I’d be sending them here,” she says.

“Here” is the Sankofa Shule (pronounced “San-koh-fuh shool”) Public School Academy, a charter school in Lansing where Cain is superintendent.

Depending on the day of the week, or even the hour of the day, Cain says she fills many roles at Sankofa. While her official title is superintendent for the public charter school, Cain says she wears many different hats, depending on what needs to be done.

“At charter schools, especially ones that are self-managed like we are, you can be superintendent, principal, curriculum director, human resources director, custodian, secretary, classroom teacher and lunch aide all at once,” she laughs. “But you just do what you have to do to get the job done and help the kids.”

Cain came to Sankofa Shule after a 30-plus year career in the conventional public school system. She began as a first grade teacher and reading consultant in the Detroit Public Schools in 1968. She moved to Lansing six years later when her husband, Eugene Cain, took a job with the state Department of Education. She started as a long-term substitute teacher with the Lansing School District, eventually holding positions including education resource specialist, classroom teacher, elementary school principal and director of elementary education.



Maxine Hankins Cain, below, speaks at a school function. Beatrice Chenge, above, teaches at Sankofa Shule.

“We’re competing against parental apathy, lack of education, drugs, low self esteem,” she said. “This is about the kids, and that should be the bottom line for us all.”

Cain said she had been a supporter of Sankofa Shule from its inception in 1995.

“It was facing some challenges and I didn’t want to see it go out of existence,” she said. “I felt I had some things to offer.”

Unlike many in the conventional public school setting, Cain said she was a supporter of the charter school concept from the beginning.

“Competition is good because it raises everyone’s level of concern,” she said. “And that always benefits kids.”

While working in the Lansing public schools when charters came into existence, Cain said she noticed the district’s reaction to that competition.

“Before, they never had enough money for all-day kindergarten,” she said. “But when the charters started offering it, suddenly Lansing found the money for it. They started offering more art, more music, more phys-ed. They responded to the competition.”

“People need to have choices,” she said. “Students come here for our small setting, our nurturing environment, and you can see a change in their behavior.”

Sankofa Shule currently has about 200 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. It offers an “African-centered” curriculum, and this month took several students on a field trip to Africa. The school’s name comes from Swahili. Sankofa, Cain says, means “going back, searching, learning lessons while young

and moving forward.” Shule means school.

“We incorporate the heritage and traditions and culture into everything we do,” Cain said. “We don’t limit it to just one month.”

Within the African-centered educational approach, the school focuses on helping students become academically and behaviorally competent and socially conscious. It also offers a wide variety of extra curricular activities as well, including science and chess clubs, basketball and soccer teams, drama, choir, yearbook and opportunities for community service and job shadowing. The school’s philosophy is based on “the way to learn is by doing,” Cain said.

The school also uses multi-age classes in order to place each student at their appropriate level of development. Cain said this is necessary because about half of all new students enter the school below grade level.

THE FUTURE

Cain said she believes the charter school movement will continue to grow as long as it fills a need.

“People need to have choices,” she said. “Students come here for our small setting, our nurturing environment, and you can see a change in their behavior.”

Cain said that while charter schools are not perfect, they are relatively young and still growing.

“We do have some challenges because of money, but people come here for the family atmosphere,” she said.

Cain thinks that while conventional public schools talk about the need for the

state to “fully fund” them, it is charters that may be getting unfair treatment. Studies show that charter schools receive roughly \$1,000 less per student than conventional public schools.

“Not only do we get by with less money, but we have the utmost level of accountability a school can have,” she said. “Every charter school is one year away from closing.”

If charter schools do not perform up to the standards set by their clients – parents and students – families can decide to look elsewhere for educational options. Since under Michigan law state education money follows the student, charter schools can be forced to close down if not enough parents choose to remain. Unlike conventional public schools, charters are subject to a heightened demand for customer service that can and does lead to closure.

“I have a board I report to,” Cain said. “Despite what some may say, we follow all the state and federal rules and regulations.”

Cain said because her school is authorized through Central Michigan University, that includes another layer of accountability.

“I have a calendar filled with dates for reports and paperwork that has to be sent to CMU,” she said. “And they keep on me about it, too.”

But ultimately it is the parents who must be satisfied.

“The fact we exist is a good thing,” Cain said. “People have to have those choices, and it keeps us alert.” ♦

“Not only do we get by with less money, but we have the utmost level of accountability a school can have,” she said. “Every charter school is one year away from closing.”

It was more than a little shocking to her former co-workers when, in 2001, Cain agreed to become the new administrator at Sankofa Shule. Eugene, it should be noted, also made the jump. Having worked in conventional public school districts and for the state, he is now superintendent of El-Shabbazz Academy, another Lansing-area charter.



“There were some tears, but others thought I was betraying them,” she said. “They told me I had jumped ship, that I was the enemy.”

Cain says she does not see herself or her school, however, as competing against the Lansing public schools.



A TALE OF TWO SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

Wisconsin governor raises scholarship limit

Florida Supreme Court ends program

Recent decisions in two states portend two very different futures for their respective scholarship programs. While Wisconsin was expanding access to Milwaukee's scholarship program, the Florida Supreme Court was outlawing the Sunshine State's voucher plan.

Wisconsin boosts cap for new schools

Participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, first started in 1989, was increased by 50 percent when Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle approved legislation that would lift the cap on the number of students eligible for scholarships or "vouchers," from 15,000 to 22,500.

Proponents of parental choice in Wisconsin fought hard to convince Doyle to sign a bill he vetoed on three previous occa-

time the accusations are refuted.

Student achievement is among the latest issues to be examined. Jay P. Green, a professor at the University of Arkansas, found in a 2004 study that students in Milwaukee's voucher program attending private schools had a 64 percent graduation rate, compared to 41 percent in the city's six magnet high schools, and 36 percent for the 37 other high schools.

The cost of the program, in which low-income students in Milwaukee can use

issue with the MPCP. Schools that accept voucher students in Milwaukee must meet state education guidelines regarding hours of instruction, compulsory attendance and curriculum content, health and safety regulations and financial accounting standards. They must also admit eligible students randomly and allow students to opt out of religious activities.

Indeed, five schools were removed from the program last year for not meeting accountability standards, and another 51 have been turned away in the last 18 months, according to the Heartland Institute.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court, in a 1998 decision that upheld the constitutionality of vouchers, pointed out the highest level of accountability a school can face.

"Schools in the MPCP are also subject to the additional checks inherent in the notion of school choice. If the private

remain in their current schools until the end of the school year. The OSP had been an alternative for students assigned to failing public schools. A failing public school under Florida Gov. Jeb Bush's "A-plus plan for education" was one that received an F grade twice in four years on a state performance report card.

The court sided with those who oppose vouchers, citing a 1998 amendment to the Florida constitution that calls for a "uniform" system of public education.

The court's decision did not directly speak to two other Florida choice programs. McKay Scholarships, for students with disabilities, can be used by students to attend independent schools after spending one year in their assigned public school. The vouchers in this program can be worth more than \$20,000, depending on the student's disability, and are used by about 15,500 students.



Mother Shelia Haygood, center, sits with her daughters Justine, 15, left, Jillian, 3, Jazzmine, 8, right, and Janae, 10, center, on the front porch of their home Saturday, July 2, 2005, in Milwaukee, Wis. Haygood uses the Milwaukee school voucher program to fund private education for three of her children. (AP Photo/Peter Zuzga)

sions. The effort to persuade the governor included an ad campaign that pointed out Doyle's son attended a private school.

According to School Choice Wisconsin, an organization that supports vouchers, public charter schools and other parental options in education, said the voucher program has come under attack for many different reasons over the years, and each

tax-funded scholarships to attend private or parochial schools, also has come under scrutiny. MPCP vouchers are worth \$6,351, compared to the \$11,705 that Milwaukee Public Schools spends on each student. Charter schools in the city receive \$7,519 per student.

Students in the MPCP program cannot attend school outside the city of Milwaukee, but further limiting or stopping the program would negatively affect schools statewide. A Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau study said school aid for the 425 districts outside Milwaukee would have to be cut in order to make up the difference in the voucher amount and the MPS amount. For example, if 75 percent of voucher students returned to Milwaukee Public Schools, state aid to the rest of the state's public schools would be reduced by nearly \$37 million, with that money then being transferred to MPS. By contrast, Milwaukee Public Schools, in its own study, said that if the voucher students returned to MPS, the district would face an initial capital outlay of \$70 million and an operating deficit of the same amount.

Accountability, long an argument against school choice of any kind, is a non-



Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, right, speaks to members of the media after addressing the Tiger Bay Club of Orlando in Orlando, Fla., Friday, Jan. 6, 2006. The Florida Supreme Court ruled against the state's school voucher program. (AP Photo/Phelan M. Ebenhack)

schools do not meet the parents' expectations, the parents may remove the child from the school and go elsewhere," the majority opinion said.

Florida court rejects vouchers

Half a continent away, however, the status of vouchers is decidedly different. The Florida Supreme Court on Jan. 5 struck down the state's Opportunity Scholarship Program because, in the words of the court, "through the OSP the state is fostering plural, nonuniform systems of education in direct violation of the constitutional mandate for a uniform system of free public schools."

The 5-2 vote will affect about 720 students, although the court said they could

The Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship is for low-income students, classified as those who are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches. Private companies can donate money for the program, run by a non-government agency, which then gives students \$3,500 scholarships. The companies receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for their donations. About 10,400 students participate.

In an Op-Ed appearing in the Palm Beach Post last June, Institute for Justice attorney Clark Neily argued that the OSP actually gave public schools true accountability.

"Many states promise all students a quality public education; only Florida delivers by saying to parents: 'If we can't get the job done, we'll give you a scholarship so you can find someone who will.'" ♦

SCHOOL CHOICE

Scholarship, voucher and tax credit programs from around the nation.

- Milwaukee
- Cleveland
- Florida
- Minnesota
- Arizona
- Illinois
- Vermont
- Maine
- Washington, D.C.
- Iowa
- Pennsylvania
- Utah

Tutors assist students in Michigan's under-performing schools

"Our program is 10 times better"

The numbers just don't add up for Doris Sperling. There are a handful of schools in Washtenaw County that have failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards as spelled out in the No Child Left Behind Act, but none of the 100 low-income students her Family Learning Institute in Ann Arbor serves are there due to the schools having notified parents that their children are eligible for tax-funded tutoring.

"I think we had three last year, and none this year," says Sperling, executive director of the FLI. "I haven't really been able to pin down why that is."

According to NCLB regulations, a school that receives Title I money and fails to meet AYP standards for two consecutive years must set aside at least 20 percent of its Title I dollars to pay for "supplemental educational services (SES)," commonly called tutoring, for eligible students. Schools get Title I money if 40 percent of students are classified as "low-income," meaning they receive free or reduced cost lunches.

More than 100 SES providers are approved for tutoring Title I students in Michigan, but only about 11 percent of the 103,000 eligible students statewide received the service during the 2004-2005 school year, according to a U.S. Department of Education audit. The lack of participation is believed to be caused by schools not fully communicating the option to parents, or not allowing parents enough time to sign their child up for the tutoring. Once the application process is closed, schools can revert the Title I money back to other uses.

Thompson still wants new charter schools Grand Valley State University okays first academy

Bob Thompson's desire to open new schools in Detroit took a major step forward at the end of April, when Grand Valley State University approved a charter for Public School Academies of Detroit.

The new school, scheduled to open in 2008, would be called University Prep Math and Science and be run by New Urban Learning, which already runs University Prep, a charter started by Thompson in 2000.

Thompson first came forward with an offer of \$200 million in 2003 to build 15 charter high schools in Detroit, but withdrew the offer after strong opposition arose from the Detroit Federation of Teachers. Despite the passage of a new state law that still allows for 15 new schools, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and Gov. Jennifer Granholm withdrew their initial support in the face of union complaints.

Thompson in 2005 renewed the offer, teaming with the Skillman Foundation

and former Detroit Pistons star Dave Bing. The group filed an application in August 2005 with Grand Valley State University to charter the schools, with Thompson paying for construction and Skillman paying for the day to day costs. Bing, a successful Detroit businessman, was the group's public liaison. The plan, however, continued to face harsh opposition, with the Detroit teachers union telling Michigan Education Report that the group was prepared to sue to stop the schools from being established.

That application was eventually withdrawn, however, when the foundations indicated that trying to plan 15 schools could hinder other plans to open the "Bing School" in the north end of Detroit.

"We didn't want to let Northend parents down by taking too long to get a school up and running," Carol Goss, president and CEO of Skillman, said in a press release last December. "Both found-

ations decided that we should focus our energies on working with Dave Bing to make the Northend school a reality."

That school is expected to open in the fall of 2007, but will not be a charter, Goss indicated. It will most likely be a contract school, affiliated with Detroit Public Schools. A contract school is run through a conventional public school district and has unionized teachers, but allows for some flexibility on things such as class periods in the day. A similar relationship exists now between Skillman and DPS for Communication and Media Arts High School.

Among the seven members Grand Valley appointed to PSAD's board of directors are Deborah Ball, dean of the University of Michigan's School of Education, James Nicholson, CEO of PVS Chemicals, Dan Varner, CEO of Think Detroit and Bing. ♦

"I can see why schools are not thrilled to make all that money available for the tutoring," Sperling said. "It really should have been new money, because they were already using the Title I money for other things."

Sperling still, however, cannot understand the lack of referrals to FLI, given the fact that Ann Arbor Public Schools, Willow Run Community Schools and the School District of Ypsilanti all have school buildings that have failed to meet AYP standards.

"I know some school districts started their own SES programs, but ours is 10 times better than what they can offer," Sperling said. "I don't think an after-school program at a school is going to provide the one on one attention we give. I'm afraid it just ends up being like school in the after-

noon. It's no different than what the kids get all day."

Sperling believes the individual attention her tutors give students is what leads to success. That includes an hour each week of one on one instruction, half an hour of group discussion about a particular topic and half an hour of coached writing about that topic.

"There is a psychology term called the 'Matthew Principle,' based on the Gospel of Matthew and the saying that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer," Sperling said. "In education, a child who cannot read at grade level by fourth grade will only fall farther and farther behind as the work gets harder."

Sperling said the Family Learning Institute stresses individual tutoring because the students who need help already

have experience failing in a group setting.

"As other kids progress in school, these children accumulate a sense of failure," she said. "They become intimidated by seeing the kids around them succeed. Many come up with defense mechanisms, such as being the class clown or being bad so they get removed."

Sperling said 63 percent of FLI's students in 2005 increased one grade level or more within six months.

"They can stay here as long as it takes," Sperling said. "There's one boy who is about to graduate from Ann Arbor Huron High School who came to us in sixth grade and was reading at a kindergarten level. He's now reading at a junior high level."

Because the FLI serves strictly low-income students, it is free of charge to them

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SHORT SUBJECTS

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The Michigan Education Special Services Agency, a third-party administrator affiliated with the Michigan Education Association, no longer oversees health insurance services for a large number of CMU employees. Less expensive health insurance plans, some costing \$3,350 less per year than MESSA, along with a wellness program, have saved taxpayers \$5.3 million over three years, and CMU expects to save another \$5 million this year.

More than 1,700 Detroit Public School teachers called in sick in late March, forcing the district to close more than 50 schools for the day and deny instruction to more than 36,000 children. The teachers were upset over a contract provision they approved, calling for them to loan five days of pay this semester to the district.

Hillsdale College will offer a free summer seminar July 16-22 as part of "The Gillette Company Economics for Leaders Program." Economics, social studies and history teachers are invited to attend. Each attendee will receive a \$150 stipend, and credit hours are available. Visit www.fte.org/teachers/programs for more information.

A South Carolina school district is being sued for using tax dollars to fight tuition tax credit legislation. Randall Page, president of South Carolinians for Responsible Government, says District One violated his First Amendment rights by denying him use of its "information distribution system" to support a tax-credit bill. The school used e-mail and newsletters to oppose the legislation. Page said that meant the

publicly funded communications were a "limited public forum." He filed suit in federal district court.

The Connecticut branch of the NAACP is supporting the No Child Left Behind legislation in a federal court battle. The group filed paperwork in January asking a judge in the Connecticut vs. Spellings case to allow the group to intervene on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. The NAACP is working on behalf of three minority students.

Students in Georgia would need parental permission to join clubs at school under a proposal now being considered in the state legislature. If approved, parents would have to be told the name of the club, its purpose, faculty adviser and activities before students could join. The issue arose after one school allowed a gay-straight alliance club, then eliminated all extracurricular groups after parents complained.

The Maryland Legislature voted to block action by the state Board of Education that would have made Maryland the first state to exercise a school takeover provision of the No Child Left Behind Act. The legislature overrode a gubernatorial veto to enact a law that bars the state superintendent from getting involved with failing Baltimore schools for one year. The Maryland Department of Education had planned to hire private managers to run four high schools, while seven middle schools would have been converted to charter schools. NCLB calls for state action in schools that fail to meet performance standards five years in a row.

The mayor of Hartford, Conn., appointed himself to the school board and was elected chairman, causing Superintendent Robert Henry to resign.

Changes to the city's charter gave the mayor a majority of appointments and increased the board from seven to nine members. Mayor Eddie Perez used one of the appointments for himself, saying he was impatient with the pace of improvements.

New York Gov. George Pataki wants to allow 200 new charter schools to open, including 50 in New York City. Pataki is seeking legislation that would exempt charters in New York City from being approved by the State Board of Regents, which currently must authorize new charter schools anywhere in the state. Currently, New York is at its charter cap of 100 schools.

High school seniors are improving their performances on Advanced Placement tests, according to information released by the White House. The percentage of seniors passing at least one AP exam has increased in every state since 2001. The number of students enrolled in AP classes who take the tests has also increased, going up 3 percent a year, and now stands at 74 percent. Studies have found performance on AP exams is a good indicator of future college achievement.

The Miami-Dade County school district in Florida is attempting to fire 30 teachers who were allegedly part of a false credentials ring. About a dozen teachers have resigned and another 350 are still under investigation. A former teacher last year admitted to selling continuing-education transcripts to teachers who never took the classes.

The former finance manager for the Chicago Public Schools is accused of embezzling more than \$450,000. Authorities say the woman wrote 319 checks to herself for \$456,000 from an account

at Simeon Career Academy. She resigned in October. If convicted, the woman could spend 30 years in jail.

The Kentucky Senate wants teachers with a history of drug problems to face random drug tests. The bill, which passed unanimously, would also allow superintendents to reassign teachers accused of drug-related crimes in order to keep them away from students.

An Indiana mayor wants to pay college tuition for children of city residents. Thomas McDermott Jr., mayor of Hammond, Ind., is asking the city council to approve the plan as a way to boost home ownership in the Lake Michigan town. Qualifying students would get up to \$7,500 a year for college if they qualify academically and their parents or guardian remains a resident and homeowner of Hammond while the student is in college. Graduates of public and independent high schools in the city would be eligible, and the money could be used at any public or private university in Indiana.

Educational options can now be accessed by parents online in the St. Paul, Minn., school district. Parents can visit a Web site and enter their address to see a list of schools to choose from for their children. Details including maps, test scores and demographics for each school are available, and can be read in four languages. The site recorded more than 1,000 visits in its first month.

Parents, school officials and doctors are protesting a requirement in North Carolina that all children receive an eye exam before entering kindergarten. The policy, which is to take effect this fall, is being called onerous and expensive. North Carolina Speaker of the House James A. Black, who sponsored the measure, is an optometrist. ♦

Charter advocates: segregation claims misplaced

"This is the greatest civil rights issue of our day"

A recent study wrongly blames an increase in segregated schools on charter schools, according to charter school advocates.

The study, released in February, said the number of schools in Michigan that have 80 percent or more black students has increased by more than 130 schools over the past several years. The number of such schools increased from 294 in 1992 to 431 in 2005. Of the 137 additional schools, 87 were charters.

"It's not to blame it on charter schools but to say, if anything, charter schools are exacerbating the problem," David Plank, co-director of Michigan State University's Education Policy Center, told Booth Newspapers. "What we're doing is providing African-American parents whose children are in racially isolated schools the choice of attending other racially isolated schools."

School choice advocates disagree. Harrison Blackmond, president of the Detroit chapter of the Black Alliance for Educational Options says the quality of the school, not its racial makeup, is what matters.

"It's the black students who are leaving the public schools – not because they want to segregate themselves, but because they want a chance at a better education," Blackmond told Booth. "The real story is not the segregation, the real story is the flight

of African-American students out of these underperforming schools."

Charter school leaders say "segregation," which calls to mind racism, discrimination and Jim Crow laws, is an inappropriate term. Families of any color that choose to leave the public school to which their children have been assigned and enroll at a charter school are not being forced but are making that choice on their own.

Nelson Smith, president of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, pointed this out in a March Op-Ed that ran in The Detroit News.

"So when African-American parents voluntarily choose charter schools in great numbers, as has happened in Michigan, it is disturbing to see their choice disparaged by researchers pursuing an ideological objective," Smith wrote. "Who is actually advancing Martin Luther King's dream that his children be judged 'not on the color of their skin, but by the content of their character?' My money is on the parents, not the policy wonks."

Charter school enrollment in Michigan is up 13 percent this year, to more than 92,000 students, according to the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. Detroit charters experienced an even bigger gain, 22 percent, with more than 6,500 children on waiting lists to get into charter

schools.

"What we've always understood about our schools is that they are a reflection of the communities," said Dan Quisenberry, president of MAPSA.

Telly James told The Detroit News in response to the study that she isn't surprised or concerned by lack of diversity in charters. Her daughter attends a charter school in Detroit.

"The city is predominantly black," she told The News. "When the neighborhood is black, the school is going to reflect it."

Because charter schools locate in areas where local demand is high, it is obvious the student body is going to reflect the demographics already in place for that particular neighborhood. A study done last December by MAPSA and BAEO substantiates this notion.

A poll showed 60 percent of Detroit parents feel there are not enough educational choices in the city for their families, and more than half of them have considered moving out of the city to access options. Many who want to move cannot, so charters are their answer.

"Minority and low-income parents are tired of their children being trapped in failing schools and are demanding high-quality public schools that will welcome them as partners," Smith explained in his Op-Ed.

"Charter schools are answering their call."

Plank said the underlying cause of segregated schools is residential segregation.

"It is a fact that Michigan is the most segregated state in the country," Plank said. "Public policy can either endorse and reinforce that, or try to break it down."

Because the lines for conventional public school districts are drawn around neighborhoods, rather than following municipal borders, they are thought to group families of the same socio-economic background together. Ultimately, that leads to children being assigned to schools by geographic boundaries. An April 2005 Los Angeles Times story about school boundaries said they separate people based on "class, culture, race and ethnicity." Many believe that eliminating those boundaries and allowing parents to choose where their children are educated would lessen the segregation in public schools.

"I'm very sympathetic to the argument that we have a state education system, with these anachronistic little critters called school districts that complicate matters," Plank said. "Removing the lines by itself wouldn't by itself decrease segregation, but it could bring other positive consequences."

The need for more educational choices among black families can be seen in the numbers. Michigan had the largest achievement gap in the nation in 2004 among fourth grade students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test. Only 8 percent of black students taking the test were proficient in reading, compared with 39 percent of white students.

"That's tragic – proof of a school system grossly negligent of tens of thousands of innocent children," Blackmond said. "This is the greatest civil rights issue of our day." ♦

MEA continues lawsuit over public charter schools

Schools continue serving students, parents

A lawsuit filed by the state's largest teachers union against the state over more than 30 public charter schools serving 10,000 students across Michigan seems to be having no effect on the day to day operations of the schools.

The Michigan Education Association filed an appeal with the Michigan Court of Appeals on March 8, claiming that public school academies chartered by Bay Mills Community College are not public schools and therefore not entitled to state funding. BMCC is located on the Bay Mills Indian Reservation near Brimley, Mich., in the Upper Peninsula.

"We're marching on," said Patrick Shannon, director of charter schools for BMCC. "Our teachers and students are engaged in teaching and learning."

Shannon said the college is reviewing new charter school applications and hopes to open a few more in the coming years.

"Our board has directed us to look at specific populations that are currently being underserved by traditional public schools," Shannon said. "We're trying to think of ways we can help dropouts and increase retention. We want to promote public education for all kids, even the ones who may not seem to fit in."

Shannon said the legal disputes, which have been going on for more than a year, have not scared away families.

"We grew from about 8,000 students last year to more than 10,000 this year," Shannon said. "We didn't anticipate so much growth, but we're happy to be there for parents and students."

With schools across the state, including Kalamazoo, Dearborn, Muskegon, Flint and Pontiac, Shannon said Bay Mills is continuing its original mission of serving students in urban areas who are from middle and low income backgrounds.

"Our environment allows us to adapt quickly to meet the needs of parents and

students," Shannon said. "We can move more quickly because we're not tied down by bargaining problems and other issues. There's a real ease to making adjustments."

While community colleges are allowed to authorize public school academies within their geographic boundaries, Bay Mills Community College's charter recognizes the entire state of Michigan as its geographic area because it is run by a federally-recognized Indian tribe.

The original suit late last year was dismissed on one count by Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Joyce Draganchuk, who also said the union lacked standing to bring suit on three of four other counts. The MEA filed its appeal based on the one count on which Draganchuk ruled the union had standing. In its brief, the union argues that the Bay Mills board of governors is not publicly elected. That in turn, the union says, means the schools chartered by the college are not public, and are therefore ineligible to receive public funds.

Assistant Attorney General Robert Dietzel argued before Draganchuk that the state's charter school law has provisions that recognize tribal community colleges, such as Bay Mills. Non-tribal community colleges, which also can authorize charter schools, have publicly elected boards.

Dietzel also said the public schools that Bay Mills has chartered are subject to the State Board of Education, which is a public body, and therefore qualify for public funds. Charter schools receive a per-pupil foundation grant from the state, but cannot raise additional tax dollars via property tax millages because they do not have geographic boundaries.

The MEA, in contrast, has argued that the schools are not subject to state authorities. Thus, the union argues, sending the schools state funds would violate the state constitution. Proponents have long said

Bay Mills Charter Schools

Academy of Warren, Warren	Hamtramck Academy, Hamtramck
Academy of Waterford, Waterford	Jackson PSA, Jackson
America Montessori Academy, Livonia	Keystone Academy, Belleville
Arts & Technology of Pontiac, Pontiac	Laurus Academy, Southfield
Bay County PSA, Bay City	Life Skills Center of Pontiac, Pontiac
Bay Mills Ojibwe	Madison Academy, Burton
Charter School, Brimley	Mildred C. Wells
Ben Ross PSA, Warren	Academy, Benton Harbor
Bingham Academy, Alpena	Mt. Clemens Montessori
Bradford Academy, Southfield	Academy, Mt. Clemens
BEST, Highland Park	Paramount Charter
Crescent Academy, Southfield	Academy, Kalamazoo
Discovery Arts &	Prevail Academy, Mt. Clemens
Technology Academy, Inkster	Richfield Academy, Flint
Eastern Washtenaw Multicultural	Three Oaks Academy, Muskegon
Academy, Ypsilanti	Triumph Academy, Monroe
Fortis Academy, Ypsilanti	Universal Learning
Frontier International	Academy, Dearborn Heights
Academy, Hamtramck	Vista Charter Academy, Wyoming
Great Oaks Academy, Madison Heights	Woodmont Academy, Southfield

not only must charter schools meet state education guidelines, they also have to meet the expectations of parents, who are free to remove a child from a charter school at any time, thereby taking the per-pupil funding with them.

"The very fact that parents make a choice would indicate to me that they would be parents who are involved in their child's education," the MEA's Lu Battaglieri said in an August 2005 deposition for the original case. Battaglieri also suggested that the union, in his view, might benefit by the closure of charter schools, saying the union is "not adverse to gaining membership," and indicating a "vast majority" of the union's revenue comes from dues, about "\$57 million out of \$70-plus million."

"(T)he more available to bargain, the more is available for them for salaries and wages," Battaglieri said. At the end of the deposition, Battaglieri says he could not recall a single complaint from MEA teachers that they have suffered any harm as a result of Bay Mills authorizing charter schools.

During the deposition, Battaglieri agreed that there is no legal prohibition to charter school teachers unionizing, but also indicated no formal attempt has been made to organize teachers in charter schools. Battaglieri said the union responds to phone calls it receives from potential members.

Battaglieri also said in the deposition he would like to see the cap on charter schools be "as low as we can go," and also indicated the MEA's lawsuit sought to shut down all of the public school academies authorized by Bay Mills, even though he also, during the same deposition, said parents had made the choice to remove their children from a conventional public school and put them in a charter school.

"We're not against charter schools," Battaglieri also said.

At another point in the deposition, Battaglieri says, he doesn't believe he has been to a Bay Mills school, and has no knowledge of the education received by the students. ♦

No child left untutored?

Available tutoring program goes unused

Administrators at 80 public school districts around Michigan that are required to pay for tutoring services under the No Child Left Behind Act are trying to figure out how best to alert the parents of eligible students.

"We're still struggling to implement NCLB because the more we understand, the more difficult it gets," Veronica Lake, who oversees specially funded programs for Grand Rapids Public Schools, told Michigan Education Report. "We're coming up with appropriate ways to get the information to parents, using different forms of media."

The law is supposed to work like this: schools that receive Title I funds and are classified as "in need of improvement" for two consecutive years under NCLB's Adequately Yearly Progress requirements are supposed to allocate at least 20 percent of their Title I budget to pay for private tutoring, known as "supplemental educational services." The money also can be used to transport students who wish to attend another school. A Title I school is one wherein 40 percent of students are classified as low-income, meaning they receive free or reduced cost lunches.

The legislation requires that districts notify parents of eligible students, but some say the window of opportunity is too short for parents to fully understand the situation, research their options and make the appropriate arrangements. Once the sign-up period expires, schools can redirect the money away from tutoring and back to other programs.

A U.S. Department of Education audit from 2005 found only 11 percent of the 103,282 Michigan students eligible for tutoring actually received the services. Michigan has about 1.7 million students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Martin Ackley, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Education, told The Detroit News at the time that the state was not willfully out of compliance, but that the law is so complex that it has to be implemented in stages.

Ackley said part of the corrective action the state has taken requires school districts to submit samples of letters sent to parents, notifying them that their child is eligible for tutoring. Department of Education employees making site visits to schools and at regional workshops also have addressed this issue. Ackley said school districts are doing things other than sending letters, such as visiting PTA meetings, making information available in other languages, addressing the issue during parent-teacher conferences, extending or eliminating registration deadlines, and having counselors call parents directly.

Lake said Grand Rapids began notifying parents of students eligible for tutoring in late October. About 200 students out of a possible 1,400 signed up during a 30-day period the district gave parents to enroll their children.

"We closed the window, but it wasn't a tight closure," Lake said. "We had a provider fair in January, where the tutoring companies were able to talk with parents and explain what they have to offer. We also had a few providers drop out, so we waited until students could be reassigned."

Lake said that by mid February, when the sign-up period closed officially, the number of students had doubled, to 400. That still left 1,000 eligible students who are not receiving tutoring, but Lake said a variety of factors come in to play.

"You have a certain percentage that just aren't going to be involved, no mat-

Michigan Education Report | COMMENTARY

Technically Foolish — why technology has made our public schools less efficient



Frederick M. Hess

Michigan education officials are championing a new regulation that would require every high school student's education to include a substantial "online experience" of some kind, with the assumption being that most would complete an online class. To fulfill this vague new mandate, district technology officials in Detroit and elsewhere argue that extensive, unspecified expenditures will be necessary. This proposal is drawing national attention as visionary, though it is more remarkable for the manner in which it neatly illustrates the problems with how we think about technology and schooling.

Absent in Michigan, and often elsewhere, is serious thought about how technology might help cut costs or modernize educational delivery. The Michigan Department of Education's chief academic officer explains the idea's genesis in the same vague manner that a sophomore might describe a class project: "We thought of this as a skill that people would need to have to continue to be lifelong learners." The Michigan proposal finds a way to turn the sensible adoption of new technology into a boondoggle that promises to expand bureaucracy, increase costs, and turn a blind eye to pursuing new efficiencies.

Even as public schools have made ever-larger investments in new technologies, they have steadily added to the ranks of teachers and staff. Spending on technology in public schools increased from essentially zero in 1970 to over \$100 per student in 2004, according to Education Week. In the past five years alone, the nation has spent more than \$20 billion linking schools and classrooms to the

Internet through the federal E-rate program. Between 1997 and 2004, the federal government appropriated more than \$4 billion to help states purchase educational technology. Meanwhile, these huge new investments in technology were coupled with a massive increase in the teacher workforce that drove the student-teacher ratio from 22 students per teacher in 1970 to 16 per teacher in 2001. There is no reputable analysis suggesting that the billions invested in technology have enhanced the productivity or performance of America's schools.

This state of affairs contrasts sharply with how technology is used by enterprises that face meaningful competition from alternative manufacturers and service providers. For these businesses, technology is not an end — it is a tool for self-improvement. New technologies are adopted when they enable workers to tackle new problems or do the same things cheaper and more efficiently.

Even the oft-maligned Postal Service understands this. It found ways to trim its workforce by more than 40,000 in the past four years — when sufficiently squeezed by competitors such as UPS and Federal Express. The USPS substituted technology as it identified routine tasks where automation was cheaper and more efficient than human labor.

Why do inviolable laws about the productive benefits of technology seem to stop at the schoolhouse door? Organizations like the Postal Service make effective use of technology because they must keep up with the competition. Knowing their competitors are constantly seeking ways to boost productivity, hold down costs, and develop new products, for-profit enterprises are always on the lookout for similar advantages. It's not that any ex-

ecutive likes painful measures such as downsizing; they take these steps because survival requires it.

Insulated from such pressures, school boards and superintendents have little incentive to view technology as a tool for trimming jobs or rethinking educational delivery — especially given union hostility and public skepticism. Meanwhile, existing collective-bargaining agreements between school districts and employees have made using technology to displace workers or reinvent processes extraordinarily difficult.

If anything, there is a bias in education against ideas deemed too "businesslike." Indeed, the very words "efficiency" and "cost-effectiveness" can set the teeth of parents and educators on edge. Proposals to use technology to downsize the workforce, alter instructional delivery, or improve managerial efficiency are inevitably attacked by education authorities like the wildly influential Henry Giroux, a professor at Canada's McMaster University, as part of an effort to, "Transform public education . . . [in order] to expand the profits of investors, educate students as consumers, and train young people for the low-paying jobs of the new global marketplace."

Ultimately, if leaders lack the incentives to pursue new efficiencies, they won't. So long as technology serves as an easy applause line and an excuse to demand ever more school spending, rather than an opportunity to re-engineer educational delivery, America's schools will remain ill-equipped for the rigors of the 21st century. Michigan's bad idea is evidence of that.

Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

ter how many ways you try to contact the parents," she said. "Then you have another group of parents who know their child may be eligible, but they're satisfied with what is occurring during the school day, with intervention programs and extra attention, and our after-school programs."

Figures from the Michigan Department of Education show 2,356 students in GRPS were eligible for tutoring during the 2004-2005 school year. Of the 384 who applied, 292 received services.

Lake said, however, that the bottom line is the law must be followed.

"The law says children have a right to these services," she said. "As a parent, if my child were struggling, I'd want them to get help. Whatever has to

happen to do what's best for the kids, that's where districts need to beef up their responsibility."

Elsewhere in Michigan, school districts are having varying degrees of success in meeting the law's requirements, according to Michigan Department of Education figures. Battle Creek Public Schools, for example, had 1,624 students eligible for tutoring, with only eight students applying for help and six receiving it. In Detroit Public Schools, the largest district in the state, 40,199 students were eligible for tutoring last year. A little more than 10,730 applied for it, and just over 6,000 received it. In the Armada schools, all six students who were eligible for tutoring received it.

The problem exists, however, not just in Michigan. Districts around the

nation recount a similar pattern. The New York Times, for example, reported that less than half of the 215,000 eligible students in New York City received the after-school tutoring. In California, slightly more than 95,500 students out of a possible 800,000 got help. In Los Angeles, 5,000 students out of 50,000 who were eligible were tutored, and in Maryland, 558 of a possible 19,500 were helped. The Kansas City Star reported on a similar situation in the Kansas City, Mo., schools, where not even all of the 1,305 students who sought tutoring help received it, and some 14,000 others who were eligible did not even sign up.

The U.S. Department of Education says that nationally, only 12 percent of eligible students received tutoring, or 226,000 out of 1.9 million. ♦

Tutoring

continued from Page 8

and their families. The non-profit agency operates on donations and grants to cover rent, utilities and salaries.

"I look at the kids who come here every week and I just know some of them have to be eligible for the Title I money to pay for their tutoring," Sperling said. "If we were getting some money for them, we wouldn't have to be so strict on the low-income requirements and we could be helping even more children."

Veronica Lake, who oversees specially funded programs for the Grand Rapids Public Schools, said she doesn't think school districts would intentionally keep a student away from help in order to divert money to other programs. She said often times parents are satisfied with the corrective measures students receive in school, while other times parents are not involved with their children enough to know or care that help is available.

While SES tutoring is designated for

low-income students in failing schools, other private tutoring companies offer a wide range of services, including advanced help for students looking to challenge themselves.

"We offer everything from reading, writing and math up to ACT and SAT preparation," according to Tobin Yoder, part owner of Edvantage Education in Midland, which is a Sylvan Learning franchisee.

"Our math, for example, covers everything from basic kindergarten work all the way up to calculus," Yoder said. "We also offer courses in how to refine study skills, learn speed reading and even homework support for things like chemistry, although that's a little limited because we don't have actual science equipment."

Yoder said services can benefit students who need help as well as those who want to get ahead and stay ahead. A four-hour assessment in reading and math is given to each new student.

"This helps us pinpoint where they are and develop a program for the level they're at," he said. "For the kids who need help, it needs to be right at their level because if it's

too difficult, it just mirrors the frustrations they've been having in school."

Another advantage to basing the course of study at a student's current proficiency is that it allows them to experience instant success.

"We start by building the base skills, then moving up by levels," Yoder said. "We retest them after every 36 hours of tutoring to have a benchmark. We want to know what are they retaining, if they are progressing."

Another service Edvantage offers is student enrichment classes.

"We have kids who are going to summer camps for academically talented students," Yoder said. "They come in to brush up on certain things and prepare for that."

Edvantage usually provides instruction on a 3-1 ratio of students to instructors.

"A small group like that allows for direct attention, but still some independence," Yoder said. "We don't hold their hand because that's not what happens in class." ♦

COMMENTARY

Building School Facilities with Public-Private Partnerships



Ronald D. Utt

Michael D. LaFaive

During the past decade, many parents, teachers and public officials have argued that public school buildings are overcrowded, obsolete or unsafe. This concern has produced a surge in spending on school infrastructure — a cost to taxpayers that could be reduced through public-private partnerships.

According to U.S. Census data, spending on primary/secondary facilities has increased 213 percent over the past 10 years, and is growing almost twice as fast as spending on new residential construction, which itself has experienced one of the biggest booms in recent memory. In 2004, school districts spent more than \$29 billion nationwide on new schools, additions and modernizations. This is a record, according to American School and University magazine.

In Michigan, school construction spending is up dramatically. According to the Anderson Economic Group, between 1994 and 2004 property taxes dedicated to school debt activity — such as school construction spending — increased 217 percent. This greatly outstripped inflation, which rose by less than 21 percent during the same time period. It also outstripped enrollment, which increased less than 12 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Education. A February 2004 report from

the Michigan Land Use Institute found: “(A)nnual expenditures in the U.S. for school construction doubled since 1992. In Michigan they tripled.”

Indeed, from 2003 to 2004, applications to the Michigan School Bond Loan Program, a state Treasury plan that indirectly subsidizes the cost of school borrowing for new construction projects, jumped from 24 to 40. The overall value of Michigan public school projects (including technology, furnishings, site acquisition and other expenses) increased by a surprising 65 percent between 2003 and 2004.

What mechanisms might be employed to save districts — and thus taxpayers — money in school construction? A number of innovative solutions have emerged in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, and many involve partnerships with private developers, builders and non-profit agencies.

In the United Kingdom and Nova Scotia, a private developer will often finance 100 percent of the construction of a new school in exchange for long-term lease payments from the school system. This lease may run for 20 or 30 years and cover only normal business hours. After hours, the developer is free to lease the building to compatible educational organizations such as trade schools, refresher programs, colleges and universities.

Much of the developer’s increased revenues under this arrangement are effectively passed on to schools in the form of lower rent. When builders know they can make

more money by leasing their facility at night, they adjust their bids accordingly when they vie for the right to build the school.

In many cases, school systems also have the option to buy the building at a predetermined price. Contracts may even call for the owner of the building to refurbish the kitchen or other aspects of the building.

The United Kingdom has the world’s most extensive public-private partnerships for schools. Since 1997, such partnerships have driven the new construction or renovation of 256 school buildings. Currently, work is underway on another 291 schools, and an additional 222 schools are in various stages of the procurement process for renovation or new construction through public-private partnerships. Clearly, the approach has appeal.

Consider the money that could be saved if a frugal public school district partnered with an organization like the Bouma Corporation of Grand Rapids (this example is not meant to suggest Bouma’s interest in such a partnership). The Bouma Corporation designs and builds charter schools for as little as \$65 per square foot, or about \$100 per square foot when land acquisition and furniture costs are included. By contrast, new conventional public schools, such as the Cass Technical High School and Detroit High School for the Fine, Performing & Communication Arts, cost about \$262 and \$391 per square foot, respectively. Furthermore, Bouma’s buildings are built in one-fifth the time of similarly sized school buildings.

Combining such private-sector cost advantages with a partnership in which a private firm can rent out a building after normal school hours could dramatically reduce school districts’ costs for developing educational infrastructure. The savings could matter greatly in fast-growing suburbs, deteriorating cities, and places that are experiencing a demographic boom of school-age children. Although there are many reasons why some communities are struggling with school infrastructure, a common cause of the shortfalls is the cumbersome public-sector design and construction process.

As has been demonstrated in the United States, Canada and especially the United Kingdom, public-private partnerships offer the prospect of serving more community needs for less cost and in less time. Michigan school officials may wish to pursue public-private construction partnerships in order to save money and reduce the need for higher property taxes.

Note: Portions of this article were excerpted from the Ron Utt study, “Public/Private Partnerships Offer Innovative Opportunities for School Facilities,” a publication of the Maryland Public Policy Institute.

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COMMENTARY

Averaging Our Way to Average



Ryan Olson

The Michigan Education Association and other interest groups are attempting to mandate funding and spending increases in the state education budget. Most of the rhetoric from both proponents and detractors has focused on mandatory funding increases set at the rate of inflation, but the proposal includes other ominous policies that would water down incentives and further damage educational quality.

One such policy is averaging enrollment numbers over three years, a Trojan horse that would substantially and negatively alter incentives for districts to offer quality instruction and practice careful administration and fiscal management. Under current state law, a majority of Michigan’s K-12 education money is provided by the state to local districts through a foundation allowance for each student. The total amount a district receives through foundation allowances is based on its pupil count.

Generally, the foundation allowance follows the student. For example, if the parent of a student at Bunker Middle School in the Muskegon city district wants her child to fill a seat made available by the neighboring Mona Shores district, most of the foundation grant from the Muskegon district would be paid to Mona Shores instead of Muskegon.

The petition circulated by the MEA and currently being considered by the state legislature would require the state to distribute funds based on the larger of two figures: the current year’s enrollment, or the average of the current year’s enrollment and the enrollments in the previous two years. The three-year calculation method is currently used only for districts meeting very specific size criteria.

If the proposal had been in effect last year, the Muskegon district would have received funding from the state for about 6,100 students, even though the district’s

enrollment for funding purposes was about 5,880 that year. Tellingly, the difference between Muskegon’s actual and averaged enrollments is about the same as the number of Muskegon students who transferred to the Mona Shores district last spring, according to data from the state government’s Center for Educational Performance and Information.

Set aside the fact that the proposal’s enrollment calculation would put financial strain on the School Aid Fund by inflating the total number of students actually attending Michigan schools.

The more insidious effect of the proposed mandate would be to weaken incentives created by competition. What strong incentive would the Muskegon district have to improve educational quality enough to encourage students not to transfer to another district or to a nearby charter school? What compelling motive would the Muskegon school board have to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars if the board knew that losing kids to another district would have only a diminished effect on the district’s revenue?

In fact, the mandate would substantially weaken the limited influence parents have in the current system. Under limited public school choice laws, including charter schools and inter- and intra-district choice, some parents can participate in their child’s education in the most fundamental way, by choosing the school that best suits their child’s unique needs.

Every time parents choose a public but nondistrict school for their children, the assigned district loses the state funds it would have received had the parents chosen to keep their kids in the assigned school. When enough parents “vote with their feet,” a school district begins to feel the pinch. School board members, administrators and teachers begin looking for ways to cut costs and improve schools. If a district can reverse a downward trend and convince parents it’s successful, enrollment numbers and revenues will increase.

Public school choice options constitute a severely restricted market, but they

are creating market-like effects around the state. Parents are able — albeit in a limited way — to influence educational quality by making choices that affect school funding.

Further divorcing district income from actual enrollment figures would tell parents as educational consumers that their choices do not matter much. It would tell teachers and administrators that letting educational quality slip would not make much difference. It would tell school boards in districts with dwindling

numbers that they don’t need to keep as close a watch on taxpayer dollars. It would tell kids that they just don’t matter enough to have everyone count.

And it would tell other states and countries that we’re not interested in being competitive. Instead, we’d rather average our way to average.

Ryan S. Olson is director of education policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute headquartered in Midland, Mich.

Mackinac Center awards debate scholarships

Four winners get \$1,000 each

Two seniors and two juniors each won \$1,000 college scholarships after writing the top essays in the Mackinac Center for Public Policy’s Debate Workshop series.

Two of the students attend Grand Rapids Catholic Central High School. Ryan Orzechowski, a junior, and Catherine Leiber, a senior, received their awards during a spring assembly ceremony May 12. Leiber plans to attend John Carroll University.

Daniel Overbeek, a senior at Grand Rapids Northview High School, will attend the University of Michigan in the fall. Mark Thrall, forensics teacher at Northview, said he felt the 2005 debate workshop in Grand Rapids was “the best one we’ve ever attended.” Both Thrall and Mike Martin, debate coach at Catholic Central, said they plan on attending the 2006 workshop.

Chelsea Baker, a junior from Hudson High School, was the fourth winner.

The 2006 workshops will again be held in Livonia, Jackson, Grand Rapids and Traverse City, Sept. 25-28. Greg Rehmke and Rich Edwards, both of whom spoke at all four workshops in 2005, are confirmed to attend the 2006 sessions. Debate coaches and teachers can call Ted O’Neil at (989) 631-0900 for more information. www.mackinac.org/debate



DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS

Does the No Child Left Behind Act help black students?

YES: Test scores prove it



Thomas Sowell

There have been many bitter complaints from teachers and principals about the Bush administration's "No Child Left Behind" Act — and more specifically about having to "teach to the test" instead of doing whatever teachers and principals want to do.

Now the results are in.

Not only have test scores in math and reading shown "solid gains" in the words of the New York Times, young black students have "significantly narrowed the gap" between themselves and white students. All this is based on official annual data from 28,000 schools across the country.

What is especially revealing is that it is the young black students who have made the largest gains while older minority students "scored as far behind whites as in previous decades."

In other words, the children whose education has taken place mostly since the No Child Left Behind Act show the greatest gains, while for those whose education took place mostly under the old system, it was apparently too late to repair the damage.

Do not expect either the New York Times or the education establishment to draw these conclusions from these data. Nor are black "leaders" likely to pay much attention, since they are preoccupied with such hustles as seeking reparations for slavery.

"By their fruits ye shall know them," may be an ancient adage but results take a back seat to dogma when it comes to the education establishment. That is why there has been so little to show for all the additional billions of dollars poured into American education during the past three decades.

Ironically, there was another report issued recently, this one giving results of opinion polls among professors of education, the people who train our public school teachers. It is also very revealing as to what has been so wrong for so long in our schools.

Take something as basic as what teachers should be doing in the classroom. Should teachers be "conveyors of knowledge who enlighten their students with what they know?" Or should teachers "see themselves as facilitators of learning who enable their students to learn on their own?"

Ninety two percent of the professors of education said that teachers should be "facilitators," rather than engaging in what is today called

"directed instruction" — and what used to be called just plain teaching.

The fashionable phrase among educators today is that the teacher should not be "a sage on the stage," but "a guide on the side."

Is the 92 percent vote for the guide over the sage based on any hard evidence, any actual results? No. It has remained the prevailing dogma in schools of education during all the years when our test scores stagnated and American children have been repeatedly outperformed in international tests by children from other countries.

Our children have been particularly outperformed in math, with American children usually ending up at or near the bottom in international math tests. But this has not made a dent in our education establishment's dogmas about the way to teach math.

What is especially revealing is that it is the young black students who have made the largest gains while older minority students "scored as far behind whites as in previous decades."

What is more important in math, that children "know the right answers to the questions" or that they "struggle with the process" of trying to find the right answers? Among professors of education, 86 percent choose "struggling" over knowing.

This is all part of a larger vision in which children "discover" their own knowledge rather than have teachers pass on to them the knowledge of what others have already discovered. The idea that children will "discover" knowledge that took scholars and geniuses decades, or even generations, to produce is truly a faith which passeth all understanding.

What about discipline problems in our schools? Fewer than half of the professors of education considered discipline "absolutely essential" to the educational process. As one professor of education put it, "When you have students engaged and not vessels to receive information, you tend to have fewer discipline problems."

All the evidence points in the opposite direction. But what is mere evidence compared to education dogmas? We need more "teaching to the test" so that dogmas can be subjected to evidence.

Thomas Sowell is the Rose and Milton Friedman Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. This column originally appeared on Townhall.com



Jim Horn

The initial passage and continuing support for No Child Left Behind was built on a rationale based exclusively on the potential for positive results from the law's implementation.

In order to sell NCLB to those who remained unmoved by promises of accountability, a social reformist rhetoric was developed around the core message that NCLB would offer academic support for the poor, the neglected, and the minority children who had been left to languish in sub-standard schools.

It is not for me to say who did and who did not believe this marketing strategy, but no one can question its effectiveness in swaying reluctant supporters and in dismissing non-supporters as weak naysayers or closeted racists. Proponents of NCLB charged skeptics with the "soft bigotry of low expectations." Even the name of the bill made resistance difficult. Who, after all, wants to admit to leaving a child behind?

NCLB opponents, a constituency that seems to be growing at a rate similar to that of suburban parents finding their schools labeled as failures, have not wilted under the unwavering verbal campaign waged by NCLB advocates. They continue to question the sustainability of a policy requiring schools, particularly poverty-stricken schools, to achieve 100 percent proficiency in reading and math by 2014.

They stubbornly talk about the crushing effects of repeated failures for an increasing number of schools and schoolchildren, who are routinely left behind in the wake of a policy stamped with the "hard racism of unachievable demands."

Regardless of which side one takes in this debate, it is clear that 100 percent proficiency in reading and math, even if achievable, will not end achievement gaps — no more than it will end income and opportunity gaps, which are the primary sources for the achievement gaps to begin with. That is unless we are willing to place a ceiling on achievement at the basic level of proficiency that NCLB performance goals call for.

In 2000, Louisiana was the only state to use a single test to make promotion decisions in elementary school. Now 10 states are doing this, with nine of them among the top 10 in African-American or Hispanic populations.

Twenty states currently require high school exit exams, including the 10 states with the lowest graduation rates. By 2009, 25 states will require exit exams.

Another problem that has emerged since standardized testing was kicked into high gear by NCLB involves a disturbing and continuing trend toward school resegregation and the resulting homogenization of school populations.

It did not take NCLB to begin the resegregation of American public schools. That process started in the 1970s as a result of a number of factors, not the least of which were some critical federal court cases that struck down or watered down federal desegregation orders.

In a recent op-ed piece in the Oregonian, Carol Berkley, a teacher in Portland, passionately protests the test-induced phenomenon in Portland that threatens years of conscious effort to integrate the city's neighborhoods. Test scores in Portland are now having an impact on property values and home-buying patterns.

Because schools with sizable minorities are finding themselves increasingly on the watch list for failing to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP), students in these schools, both white and minority, are given the opportunity to transfer to other, high-scoring Portland schools.

This creates a brain drain and leads to white flight from the watch-listed schools in integrated neighborhoods, while it discourages new families from moving into these neighborhoods if they can afford to buy elsewhere.

The generalizations drawn from failure of schools to meet AYP in any of the 31 performance category sub-groups leave the public impression that these are failing schools in failed communities.

In order to join the up and coming rather than the down and out, affluent families planning to move to Portland or any other city simply need to check the test scores published alongside the percentages of minority students on Internet sites sponsored by the same companies that rate stocks and bonds. Test scores are providing a convenient vehicle to efficiently resegregate American schools without ever uttering the word "race."

Regardless of a school's socioeconomic status, there is a decreased likelihood for schools to meet AYP as the number of testing subgroups increases. Thus, there is a clear incentive to discourage the presence of populations that are likely to threaten a school's chances of making AYP.

Perhaps there is a dawning realization that blaming the schools for botched economic policies may constitute successful diversions that mask more insidious agendas.

But as a basis for school improvement or for democratic ideals, these testing solutions may reflect, in fact, a dangerous and cynical expression of an oppressive form of social engineering paraded about under the banner of economic and cultural liberation.

Jim Horn is assistant professor of educational foundations at Monmouth University in West Long Branch, N.J. This column originally appeared in the National School Board Association Newsletter. Used with author's permission.

Diverse Viewpoints are the opinions of the authors and not those of Michigan Education Report. Tell us what you think: "Does the No Child Left Behind Act help black students?" Send your comments to the following address:

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