MICHIGAN EDUCATION REPORT

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SHORT SUBJECTS

Several teachers unions, locals and other groups have abandoned MESSA recently, continuing a growing trend across Michigan. Administrators in Whitnell 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 from 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.

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.

 MEP STAFF SALARIES 2004-05

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

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


Of the MEA staffs who work at the union’s East Lansing headquarters, 63 made more than $12,000 a year, according to the LM-2. Of the union employees earning more than the average Michigan teacher, 36 made more than $100,000 a year. The MEA’s 133 Unionservicemen and women 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 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 $174,763, and Allan Short, director of government affairs, who earned $147,492.

Trimer-Hartley, at $131,203, was just

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 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 $9 billion including state, federal and local sources.

If that much money were to be culled from other parts of the state’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 by the Michigan Business Roundtable showed 65 percent of likely voters support charging more to the parents of students who are held back.

A “TOTAL DISCONNECT”

MEA staff salaries found to be considerably higher than teachers’

The average employee of the Michigan Education Association made $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.


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MEASALARIES, Page 3

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

Source: Michigan Business Roundtable

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Privatization

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 prices, districts are becoming more creative.

Ypsilanti 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 would have paid 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 took into account money not spent on increased wages and benefits, inflationary costs and equipment 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 the three administrative assistants 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 $138,000.

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 privatizing 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 the district spent $600,000 a year on its each of 65 buses, and that one private company said they could do it for $400,000 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 Ann Arbor 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.

Where considering such a decision, schools can look to the success of Pinckney Community Schools. The district 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 Ludlow Transit, all at the same hourly pay rate the district was paying.

Aside from the revenue of selling its buses to Ludlow, 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.

School Funding

A Lansing firm found 56 percent of those surveyed think the funding mandates, but the number drops to just 39 percent support when put in the context of the other pressures on police and fire protection or tax hikes.

While those who support the mandate often do so to get more "full funding education," the chamber points out that between 1994 and 2004, spending on public education increased 43 percent, but per-pupil spending went just up 5 percent during the same period.

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

"The chamber says 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.

"I'm even disagreement among public school officials that a funding problem exists. Sharron Norman, school improvement director for the Ypsilanti Public Schools, told the Lansing State Journal that a 20 percent point increase in the MEAP 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 misrepresenting facts. The Michigan Education Report last fall, Chamber President Jim Barrett pointed out that education leaders in 2002 were opposed to earmarking any monies from the tobacco settlement money and lobbied against Proposal 4, which would have earmarked millions of dollars specifically for education. Barrett wrote that the Michigan Federation of Teachers urged their members to vote against Proposal 4, saying that if passed, the new legislature will have no flexibility in dealing with the state's budgetary crisis and would remove an important resource in the years ahead based on changing needs or circumstances.

Jim Barrett believes that this year's funding mandate would undermise legislative oversight and weaken the role of the governor. If passed, the mandate would establish the only portion of state government with a constitutional mandate for 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 growing districts who can afford to pay the costs still instead go to subsidize smaller schools.

Other details of the proposal, such as additional language that would eliminate the governor's discretion and shifting responsibility for part of the school employee pension contributions from the state would likely be nullified if the 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.

"Any industry that would spend twice as much money and produce the same output as we have would be out of business," Greene said. "Basically there has been no change in the amount spent on public education in the last 30 years."

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.

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

Greene did say the NAEP results are flaky for our economy, which is a good sign.

"That can be reassuring, but only if it's coming from good sources," Greene said. "Any industry that would spend twice as much money and produce the same output as we have would be out of business," Greene said. "Normally, in industry, the pattern is to spend more and produce more. We are a productivity crisis in education."

Greene did say the NAEP results are flaky for our economy, which is a good sign.
Charter school property could sell
A Lansing-area charter school is caught between competing pieces of legislation. Senate Bill 940, introduced by former Sen. Virg Bernero, who is now the mayor of Lansing, would convey the current property to the state. The property is currently owned by Mrs. Tuhsmeheta in Greenville, with the school district paying the state $570 a year in dues to the MEA to fund the retirement fund liability for MEA employees. The property was first purchased by the state Department of Management and Budget to first offer the property to the charter school. Mid-Michigan Charter Academy, the charter school, has 180 days to decide whether or not to purchase the property. HB 5354 would set the 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 Netline for the Blind Fund. Another 5 percent or $50,000, whichever is less, would go toward the Michigan School for the Blind ($50,000 in deferred compensation and $1.5 million in cash.).

Michigan Votes
www.michiganvotes.org/2006-HB-4278

Sinking fund expansion
Legislation in the state House could expand the ways in which school districts spend their sinking funds. The measure was referred to the House Education Committee. HB 5709 would allow money sinking fund tax dollars to be used for purchasing school buildings with technology. Schools would be able to use the money for school buildings with technology. Schools would be able to use the money for school buses, or for the purchase of computers, and provide supplementary equipment used for pupil instruction. The bill was referred to the House Education Committee.

MEAP confusion
House Bill 6555 is a one-sentence bill that would require the Department of Education to work with school districts and the federal government in case of dispute 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 allows the department of education to be held accountable if paperwork is filed late due to a delay caused by a third party, such as a school district, or at the state's first six years of testing. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Education.

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Chris Card, music teacher at Weberville High School, resigned from the Michigan Education Association, citing a religious objection.
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 English. That will change, however, in the fall of 2007.

The House and Senate each passed bills that include the bulk of the original plan approved by the state Board of Education. A conference committee worked out the finer details of the legislation to ensure that specific subjects would be required. That process lasted most of the month of March and was completed in time for the 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 invest in our state,” Granholm said in the bill signing. “This new challenging curriculum will ensure that every student in Michigan is prepared for college or technical training immediately after graduation.”

The requirements include four years each of English and math (including algebra I and II), two years of science (including biology, chemistry or physics), one year of foreign language, and three years of history or social studies. A five-year plan 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 in the plan, and a requirement for civilizations from each continent and certain kingdoms from Africa to be studied in a world history course.

ISSUES

Legacy issues, Okun says, include salary, health insurance and retirement costs. Okun provided a case in point by noting the Health Insurance Plan for Education Workers (HIPEW), a two-level Department of Consumer and Industry Services, the MBER handles two specific insurance plans, a mandatory plan and a voluntary plan, especially those experiencing contract negotiation difficulties. The first is what is known as “composite,” where all the districts are filing more often because of their financial situations. They are the ones looking for any way to save money, any way to improve the financial viability for how the money is spent. ULPs have been filed by both sides in Holland and Mount Pleasant, for example, related to flight benefits and, statewide attention.

According to the Holland Sentinel, both the district and the teachers union have filed multiple complaints against the other, as negotiations focus primarily on base salary and health insurance. "I made the decision, however, for a school board to take such a step against its employees is not taken lightly," Gross said. "When we first started this whole process, we were warned by our attorney that we would be in violation of state law if our contracts that occurred were completely out of line."

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

“The day we filed our appeal they were going to bring us the negotiating table the following night,” Garcia said. “We felt we had to sign such an agreement not to negotiate in public.”

The Sentinel also reported the district filed a complaint against the union which felt it would have increased costs, something known as “regressive bargaining.”

Gross, the Holland Education Association filed ULPs of its own against the school district, based on a letter the school board sent to the union in response to the contract issues, and over a claim that the union did not receive financial information it in fact did have.

“I’m not sure what the trend is around the state with school boards doing this,” Garcia said. "I know it’s happening. We were very cautious not to jump to the first opportunity.”

The Holland Sentinel added that over a ULP which can be filed are sometimes confusing. Lakeview Public Schools, in metro Detroit, declared a financial crisis, which instituted a new health insurance plan, also giving teachers a raise, which in turn prompted the union to threaten to file an injunction to stop the new insurance plan from being implemented, a Macomb County Circuit Court judge said the union had failed to show it was negatively affected by what the district had implemented, however. The district had not generally not considered a negative thing. The issue, however, is that the pay raise was given outside the context of the negotiations, and the district made clear that it was not to be considered an unfair labor practice.

“I’ve been here eight years and I’ve never seen a decision that would end up taking the money away from the teachers that has been paid,” Okun said about the Lakeview situation. “The decisions aren’t made in the interest of the teachers and in the interest of both parties.”

Aside from the labor complaints, Michigan Education Association is excited about the new health insurance plan, and a requirement for civilizations from each continent and certain kingdoms from Africa to be studied in a world history course.


Health insurance changes occurring statewide

 Savings mean more for teachers, students

Public school employees around the state are experiencing significant changes to their health care insurance plans, as districts fight to contain skyrocketing costs.

The state’s Department of Education is concerned the districts will solve their problems by slashing support for the arts, a common theme for schools in the higher level math and science courses.

David King, an industrial arts education teacher in Canton, Michigan, spoke to a Senate Education Committee public hearing at the Michigan Education 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 other side of the equation as well,” King said. “Those jobs that are out sourced.”

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

“There are several risk factors involved with these populations,” said Dr. Thomas Wang of Wayne State University.

Carolyn Wierda, 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. Wierda 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.

The Michigan Public Employment Relations Commission, both the state and federal laws allow for both sides to present their case to a neutral third party. This occurs to a standstill in collective bargaining, wherein the school board must negotiate 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 in contract negotiations and an impasse in contract negotiations and an impasse in contract negotiations and an impasse in contract negotiations. This is known as an “impasse in contract negotiations” and an impasse in contract negotiations. This is known as an “impasse in contract negotiations” and an impasse in contract negotiations.
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.

“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-Shababzz Academy, another Lansing-area charter.

“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 kindergartens,” 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 extracurricular 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 classrooms 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.”

Teacher Focus
Maxine Hankins Cain

“You have to be a one-woman army”
Wisconsin boosts cap for new schools

Participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, first started in 1998, 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.

Opponents of parental choice in Wisconsin fought hard to convince Doyle to sign a bill he vetoed on three previous occasions. 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 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 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.

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

Florida Supreme Court ends program

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 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.
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 improve, and the state’s standards as spelled out in the No Child Left Behind Act, but none of the 100 long-term charter schools that the 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,” Sperling said. “According to NCLB regulations, a school that receives Title I money and fails to meet AYP standards for two consecutive years is subject to losing its Title I dollars to pay for “supplemental educational services (SES),” commonly called tutoring. Students called tutoring, for eligible students. Get school 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 to assist Title I students in Michigan, but only about 11 percent of the 103,000 eligible students statewide received tutoring in the 2004-2005 school year, according to a U.S. Department of Education audit. The lack of assistance is “unacceptable” and should be caused by schools not fully communicating the option to parents, or not allowing parents enough time to consider whether the student needs tutoring. Once the application process is closed, schools can revert the Title I money back to other uses.

“I can see why schools are not thrilled to lose that $200 because it’s available for 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 why the lack of at least some of the fact that Ann Arbor Public Schools, Willow Run Community Schools, and a few more schools that have failed to meet AYP standards.

“I know some schools started their own SES programs, but ours is 10 times better than what they can offer,” she said.

Students in Georgia would need parental permission to join clubs at a 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 advisor and activities before students could join. The issue arose after one school allowed a gay-straight alliance club, then eliminated it. “I/O” is the new program at a school is going to provide the one on one attention we give. I’m afraid that just ends up being like school in the after-

Thompson still wants new charter schools

New State University okays first academy

Bob Thompson’s desire to open new schools in Detroit took a major step forward in April, when Northern Michigan 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 Network LLC and University Prep, a charter started by Thompson in 2000.

The city 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 banning new schools from being allowed to start teaching until one of one on instruction, half an hour of group discussion about a particular topic and an hour of coached writing about that topic.

“There is a psychology term called the “Motivated Reasoning Principle,”” Sperling said of Matthew and the saying that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Sperling said. “If education, a child who cannot read at grade level by fourth grade will only fall farther and farther behind as the work gets more difficult.”

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 program, these children accumulate a sense of failure,” she said. “They become intimidated by seeing other students and struggle with test taking because of the self-defeating mechanisms, such as being the class clown or being bad so they get not noticed.”

Sperling said 63 percent of FLI’s students in 2005 increased one grade level or more in their studies.

“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 reading in high school now.”

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

Students

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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 200 new public schools to open, including 50 in New York City. Pataki is seeking legislation that would allow any school with a majority of students not “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 Act and taking the state to court battle. The group filed paperwork in January asking a judge in the Connecticut Supreme Court to intervene on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. The NAACP is working on behalf of public and independent high schools in the state of drug-related crimes in order to keep them away from students.

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 college achievement.

The Miami-Dade school district in Florida is attempting to fire 30 teachers who have failed to pass their annual scores on the Florida Basic Skills Tests. That application was eventually withdrawn after strong opposition from the U.S. Department of Education.

That school is expected to open 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 the same federal drug tests that federal employees face. Judges passed unanimously, would also allow support for a rebound, training teachers accused of drug-related crimes in order to keep them away from students.

An Indiana mayor wants to pay for 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 demographic information can be read in four languages. The site recorded more than 1,000 visits in its first month.

Parents, school officials and teachers who remember the Chicago Public Schools are accused of embezzling more than $450,000. Authorities, who had spent $700,000, came after a school board investigation, which found the money was taken after a $5,000,000 bond was issued. The former finance manager for the Chicago Public Schools is accused of embezzling more than $450,000. Authorities, who had spent $700,000, came after a school board investigation, which found the money was taken after a $5,000,000 bond was issued.

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Charter advocates: segregation claims misplaced

“This is the greatest civil rights issue of our day”

A recent study wrongly blames an increased number of isolated 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 charter schools are exacerbating the problem,” David Plank, co-director of Michigan State University’s Education Policy Center, told Booth News-papers. “What we’re doing is providing African-American parents whose children are in underserved schools the choice of attending other racially isolated schools.”

School choice advocates disagree. Harper Woods Superintendent Samuel J. Shannon, a member of the chapter of the Black Alliance for Educational Options says the quality of the school, not its racial makeup, is what matters. “Our board has directed us to look at options,” Shannon said. “We can move a child and therefore not entitled to state funding. Charter school leaders say “segregation claims are misplaced”

“Our environment allows us to adapt quickly to 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, which 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 to make sure children on waiting lists to get into charter 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.”

Shannon said the legal disputes, which have geographic boundaries. The Michigan Education Association filed an appeal with the Michigan Court of Appeals in 2005. Of the 137 additional schools, 87 were charters.

“Minority and low-income parents are two groups of children who are 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.”

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 have been having no effect on the day to day operation of the schools.

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No child left untiught?
Available tutoring program goes unused

Administrators at 80 public school districts around Michigan that are receiving federal Title I funding 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 we realize that the system is broken," said Marcy Ackley, who oversees specially funded programs for Grand Rapids Public Schools, told Michigan Education Report. "We’re not coming up with appropriate ways to get the information to the parents, using different avenues of communication.

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 required to allocate at least 20 percent of their Title I budget to pay for private tutoring, known as “supplemental educational services.”

The money can also be used to transport students who wish to attend the tutoring and to pay for other costs, so long as at least one-fourth 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 that notification 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 analysis found that 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 Department of Education had a policy that it has to be implemented in stages.

Ackley said part of the corrective action includes sending letters to parents in districts to submit samples of letters sent to parents, notifying them that their child is eligible for tutoring. A sample letter 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.

Rebecca Naft, 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 was 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 and Grand Rapids, for example, had 100 percent of 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, but only 10,760 applied, and 9,306 were accepted 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 applied for help last year.

In Maryland, 558 of a possible 19,500 were helped. The Kansas City Star reported that 72 students out of 3,105 who sought tutoring help in the Kansas City, Mo., schools, where not even all of the 1,305 students who sought tutoring help received any help, and 73 students 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
continues from Page 8

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

"Look at how many students 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," Lake said. "But the fact that they’re getting some money for them, we wouldn’t have to be so strict on the low-income part of the law. We’re already helping more children.”

Veronica Lake, who oversees specially funded programs for Pinckney Public Schools, said she doesn’t think school districts would intentionally keep students from receiving the money to other programs. She said often times parents are satisfied with the correct- ed difficulties they see in their children, while other parents are not involved with their children enough to know or care that tutoring 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,” said Jon Yoder, co-owner of Edvantage Education in Midland, which is a Sylvan Learning franchise.

"We teach math, for example, covers everything from basic kindergarten work all the way up to calculus,” Yoder said. "We also teach students how to improve their spelling, learn speed reading and even homework support for things like chemistry, although we don’t actually have the equipment to teach actual science equipment.”

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

"This helps us pinpoint where they are and develop a program for the level they’re at,” he said. "For the kids, it’s a tool for self-assessment that needs to be right at their level because 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 it allows them to experience instant success.

“We start by building the base skills, then move up to the high level,” Yoder said. "We retest them after every 36 hours of tutoring to have a benchmark. We want to see the results.”

Another service Edvantage offers is student summer camps. "We have kids who are going to summer camps for academically talented levels, but they’re not getting a brush up on certain things and prepare for that,” Yoder said.

The franchise usually provides instruction on a 3-1 ratio of students to instructors. A small group like that allows for direct feedback and individual independence, Yoder said. “We don’t hold their hand because that’s not what happens in school.”
During the past decade, many parents, teachers and public officials have argued that public school buildings are overcrowded, obso- late and need to be replaced. That 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 in the Muskegon city district in the 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 that “(A)n annual expenditure of $10 billion in the Muskegon school construction doubled since 1992. In Michigan they tripled.”

What mechanisms might be employed to save districts—and thus taxpayers—money? 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.

For example, the United Kingdom and Nova Scotia, a private developer will often finance 100 percent of the construction of a new school building, with lease payments from the school system. This lease may run for 20 or 30 years and cover only normal maintenance costs. The developer is free to lease the building to comparable educational organizations such as trade schools, technical programs, colleges and universities.

Much of the developer’s increased revenue comes from the fact that the school district will pass on to schools in the form of lower rent. When builders know they can make more money by leasing their facility at night, they will lower 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 pre-determined 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 new or renovated conventional public schools, such as the Cass Technical High School and Detroit School for the Arts, in both Detroit and the United Kingdom.

Clearly, the approach has appeal. Consider the money that could be saved if a frugal public school district partnered with an organization like the Bonura Corporation of Grand Rapids (this example is not meant to suggest Bonuma’s interest in such a partnership) The Bonuma Corporation designs and builds charter schools for as little as $65 per square foot, or about $100 per square foot land acquisition and construction costs are included. By contrast, new conventional public schools, such as the Cas Technical High School and Detroit School for the Arts, make use of conventional public-private partnerships. Clearly, the approach has appeal.

The 2006 workshops will again be held in Livonia, Jackson, 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 Overbeck, a senior at Grand Rapids Northview High School, will attend the University of Michigan in the fall. Mark Thrall, forensic. 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 Central Catholic, said they plan on attending the 2006 workshop.

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Does the No Child Left Behind Act help black students?

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 have had to languish in sub-standard schools.

It is not for me to say who did and who did not believe this marketing strategy or even question its effectiveness in swaying reluctant supporters and in dismissing non-support- ers as weak naysayers or cloistered rac- ists. Proponents of NCLB charged skepti- cists with the “‘soft bigotry of low expecta- tions.” Even the name of the bill made resistance difficult for those who, after all, want to admit to leaving a child behind?

NCLB opponents, a constituency that seems to growing at a rate similar to that of suburban parents finding their schools labeled as failures, have not willed under the unwavering verbal campaign waged by NCLB advocates. They continue to question the sustain- ability 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 word “race.”

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 achieve- ment gaps — no more than it will end income and opportunity gaps. The test scores 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 promo- tion decisions in elementary school. Now 10 states are doing this, with nine of them among the top 10 in African-American and 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 dis- turbing and continuing trend toward school resegregation and the resulting homogenization of school populations.

Jim Horn is assistant professor of edu- cation at Colorado State University at Loveland, and director of the Center for Education Policy at CSU. He is an active member of the Education Policy Project and has written extensively on the subject of educational policy. His upcoming book, “The Superfluous School,” will be published in late 2006 by Stanford University Press.