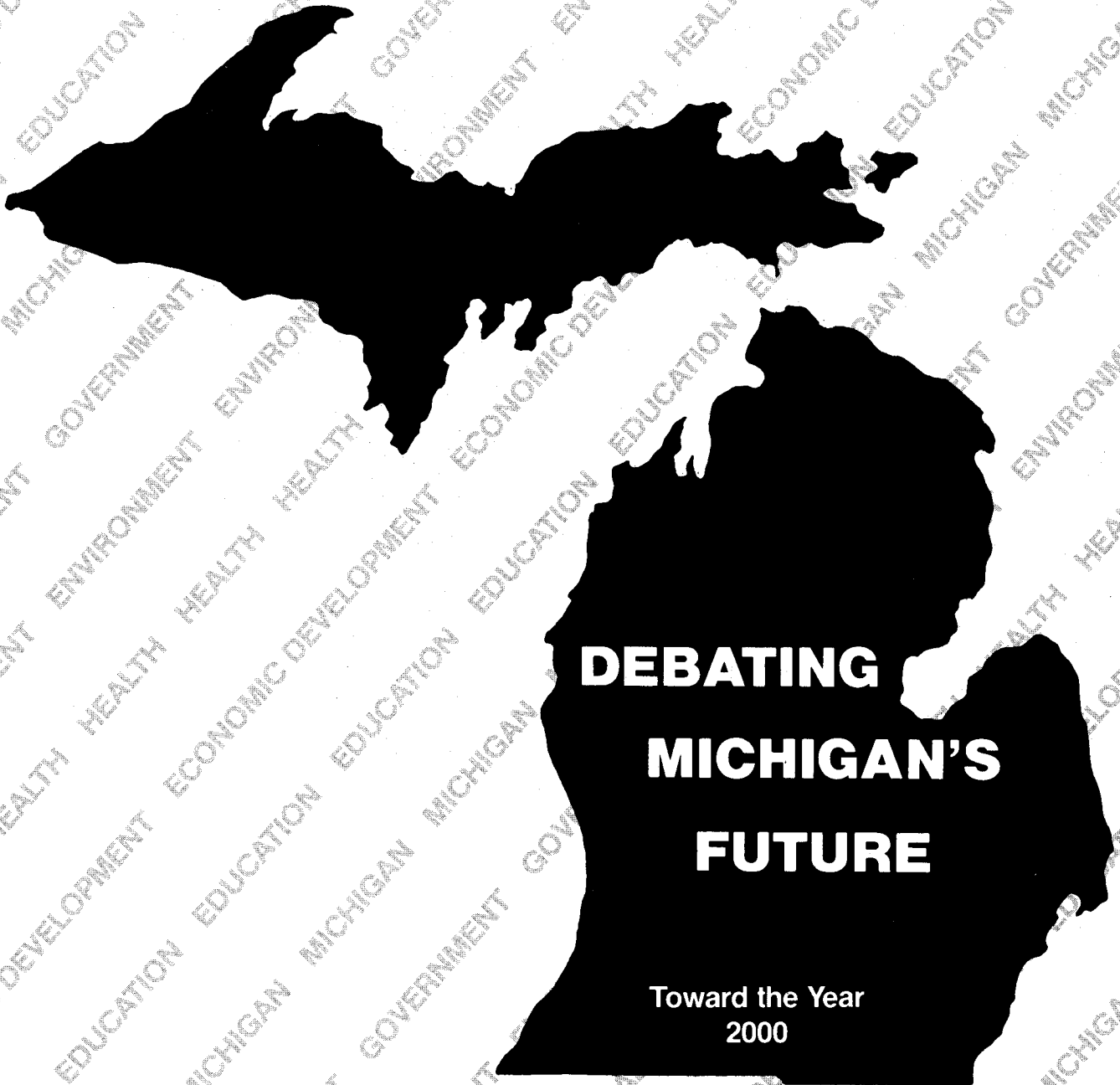


A series of publications from
PUBLIC SECTOR CONSULTANTS, INC.



**DEBATING
MICHIGAN'S
FUTURE**

Toward the Year
2000

These papers are presented to encourage thought and discussion. The comments of our readership are welcome and may be incorporated into the final publication, a compendium of the series.

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Toward the Year 2000**
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DEBATING MICHIGAN'S FUTURE

VI. EDUCATION

If our standard of living is to be maintained, if the growth of a permanent underclass is to be averted, if democracy is to function effectively into the next century, our schools must graduate the vast majority of their students with achievement levels long thought possible for only the privileged few. The American mass education system, designed in the early part of the century... will not succeed unless it not only raises but redefines the essential standards of excellence and strives to make quality and equality of opportunity compatible with each other.¹

Historically, the goal of education in America has been to instill a sense of common culture in our children, impress on them shared standards of behavior, and prepare them for productive lives. Today--in times of rapid and profound changes in population, technology, the economy, the family structure, and learning--this goal is increasingly difficult to achieve within the constraints of the existing education system.

When Michigan became a state 150 years ago, the average age of a person attending school was about nine, most students lived in two-parent households, and the education system and school calendar were designed to accommodate a population of which two-thirds were directly involved in agriculture. Values were taught in the home and church; reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught in schools.

Today, only 3 percent of Michigan's population is directly involved in agriculture, adults comprise about 55 percent of those in education and training programs, and--in the last 10 years alone--single-parent households have more than doubled. The changing nature of families and a shift away from the authority of religion has burdened the education system, by default, with the responsibility of not only educating students, but also attending to their social and emotional needs.

Many experts contend that the education system, as it exists today, cannot handle these enormous responsibilities, and with good reason. Schools organized to accommodate a way of life 150 years old cannot prepare students technically, intellectually, and emotionally to be productive citizens in the 21st century. Unfortunately, little unanimity exists on how best to alter the education system so it can adapt easily and quickly to our changing needs.

We believe there are creative ways to bring about productive change. Some have been discussed publicly by thoughtful people; others have not. We hope this paper will provoke discussion and help serve as a catalyst for change.

¹ A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century, The Report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, May 1986, p. 3.

Teachers

Teachers are the essence of education. Regardless of the length of the school day, the characteristics of the student body, the source of funding, or the organization of the school district, a good, resourceful teacher will produce knowledgeable students. Hence, the first step toward assuring quality education is to guarantee that those who teach are qualified to do so.

Good teachers possess at least two qualities: they know their subjects and they can transfer their knowledge to their audiences, whether they are graduate students or second graders. Ideally, future teachers will receive a baccalaureate degree in their subject or discipline and spend one to two additional years learning and developing teaching skills. However, several factors over which colleges of education have only limited control reduce the feasibility of this option in the immediate future.

Without effective financial incentives--higher salaries, fellowships, and paid internships--aspiring teachers are not apt to increase voluntarily the time and money spent pursuing a career in education. In addition, immediately increasing the years required to obtain a teaching degree seems counter-productive in the face of impending teacher shortages. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy estimates that because of the number of teachers near retirement, many school districts may have to replace half of their teachers within the next three to four years. In addition, the grandchildren of baby boomers are now entering school. It is anticipated that by 1992, 1.3 million new teachers will be needed nationwide. Further, increasing the quantity of time spent in a mediocre teacher-education program will do little to improve the quality of the graduate.

Enhanced teacher education should be part of future reform. However, we should begin with measures that are feasible within the financial and structural constraints of the existing system. With little or no additional state funding and without revamping the entire education system, a vigorous and more useful undergraduate teacher-education curriculum can be developed.

The curriculum should increase emphasis on subject matter, provide training in motivating and disciplining students, teach technique via videotapes of "master" teachers, strengthen written and oral communication skills, and encourage creative visualization and analysis of issues instead of rote memorization of facts.

The curriculum should also give future teachers more opportunities to practice. As early as their sophomore year, they should begin (a) teaching demonstration classes in which their performance is evaluated by their peers, (b) tutoring gifted as well as slow-to-learn youngsters to recognize their special needs, (c) experimenting on videotape with teaching styles and methodologies to determine which best suits their personality, level of skill, and intended audience, and (d) spending substantial time observing and assisting motivated, skilled, and committed teachers.

An aggressive undergraduate curriculum combined with stringent entrance requirements would significantly improve the quality of the teachers our universities produce. The standards for admission into a college of education should be rigorous. Excellent grades, superior entrance test scores, teaching-type experiences such as tutoring and being a camp counselor, and a successful admissions interview are not too much to ask. For too many years, education has been a field selected by individuals who do not have a clear-cut

career objective. Admission to teacher training programs should be open only to well-motivated and bright people who have the aptitude and a genuine desire to teach. It is time to put the lie to the old adage, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach."

Producing competent, professional, and highly skilled educators will not guarantee that they will remain in education. The importance of education must be reflected in the social and financial support we provide teachers. As a science and an art, pedagogy is as important to society as nuclear physics, genetic engineering, and telecommunications. Failure to invest teaching with similar import and status can only produce serious consequences. Teachers must be valued for their service and intellectual leadership and given a work environment in which they can perform their jobs well.

To encourage professional growth and excellence, the system must give teachers tangible incentives. Financial support for continuing education and increased skill mastery should be a standard benefit of employment. We must create a profession based and rewarded on merit.

"Master" teachers must be identified, recognized, and rewarded--in ways other than an offer of an administrative position--for their success in creating a climate of intellectual inquiry for their students and a community of scholarship with their colleagues. Master status should be attainable only through intellectual rigor and favorable evaluation by peers and students; master status must not be attainable through the routine acquisition of credit hours or years of service.

The school system must also be restructured. K-12 schools need to allow teachers to spend more time teaching and less time recording test scores, monitoring hallways, and supervising lunchroom and playground activities. Teachers' aides, college and high school students, students working toward teaching degrees, senior citizens, and parents could be used--and perhaps paid--to perform noninstructional duties.

The need for good teachers is not confined to K-12 education. Institutions of higher education must reward excellence in teaching. Postsecondary faculty are experts in their disciplines; unfortunately, expertise does not necessarily make one a good teacher. Good teaching has to start at the top: postsecondary institutions should teach their faculty in every field--not just education--how to teach. Certainly research is important and the system rewards faculty members who conduct research and publish their findings; teaching is also important and the system must better prepare, evaluate, and reward faculty in this crucial aspect of their profession. The motto of all teaching faculty should be "teach, transmit, transmute." To be unable to communicate effectively is to fail in a signal trust.

Higher Education

We are only thirteen years away from the beginning of the 21st century. Changes in social and economic conditions challenge American prosperity and economic leadership. International competition and the advent of a service economy are placing new demands on higher education. Instead of training students for a particular occupation, colleges and universities will have to prepare students for rapidly changing skill requirements, job displacements, and career shifts. Higher education must increasingly teach students how to

comprehend, reason, and communicate as lifelong skills. Colleges and universities must prepare students for their last job as well as their first.

Writing and computer use must be taught in a core curriculum that also embraces literature, history, the arts, and the physical and biological sciences. Languages must be included if we are to understand and compete in a multilingual world. Such course work should make up at least one-third of the curriculum required for a baccalaureate degree. With this common foundation, students can pursue their careers with useful understanding of themselves, their culture, and the culture of others. They must be well versed and well prepared.

This is not to suggest that colleges and universities should overlook their role in providing specialized training in technical fields. The importance of such training is undisputed. What many do not recognize is that a rigorous liberal arts education is sound preparation for any career. In a time when we depend more and more on clear and accurate exchanges of information, technical training alone is insufficient. Employers want employees who write well, think creatively, and understand how others think.

Colleges and universities must accommodate an increasingly diverse student body. At the beginning of the 21st century, 50 percent of the work force will be between the ages of 35 and 55. With fewer young people entering the labor market, there will be a need to educate and retrain older workers. College students will be older: men and women will be seeking new skills to advance in or change careers, some women will be returning to the work force after raising children, and retirees will be pursuing fresh interests for new employment and their own enrichment. The needs of these students, as they differ from those of the traditional pool of 18-to-24-year-old college students, must be reflected in the role, scope, and curricula of our higher education institutions.

The communication technology explosion is revolutionizing how people learn. Cable television, VCRs, and microcomputers are changing the way in which we access, store, and retrieve information. Colleges and universities must reach beyond their campuses; in the 21st century, their campuses will be the wider world, not just the hallowed halls within their boundaries. If higher education is to continue as the major agent for the creation and transmission of knowledge, it must not be limited by the bounds of geography, calendar, or time.

The public and private sectors must give employees opportunities and financial support to return to the classroom to upgrade skills regularly rather than wait until their skills are outdated. By encouraging employees to be proactive rather than reactive, employers can enhance the work force and reduce the destabilization and disruption of underemployment and unemployment.

Education has become a lifelong process; the desire to learn does not stop after graduation or after retirement. As the number of people over 65 continues to grow, so too will the number of people who are eager to pursue new knowledge. In a recent national survey, 80 percent of those responding favored "greater options for education and leisure" after retirement. To encourage this, both the private and public sector could include pension plan vouchers enabling employees to attend a college or university in their retirement.

In summary, by balancing technical training with a rigorous liberal arts curriculum and by accommodating increasingly diverse student bodies, colleges and universities can engender in their students an understanding of humanity and its collective social responsibility while they prepare them for unique, individual careers. Colleges and universities must not be trapped into selling merely credits and certification.

K-12 Education

The organizational structure of public K-12 schools in Michigan--a locally elected board of lay persons, a centralized administration, schools run by principals, and students geographically assigned to schools--was designed to fill 19th century needs. Within this structure, school boards, administrators, principals, and teachers have many incentives to maximize their budgets, control their clientele, and expand their influence; there are few direct incentives to provide exceptional education. There are also few incentives within this structure to assure equality of opportunity. The education a child receives is based mainly on fortuitous factors--where the child lives; the taxpayers' willingness to pay taxes; the school board's ability to run a school district, manage a budget, and design a curriculum; an administrator's ability to run a school; and a teacher's ability to teach. Too often curricula are not sufficiently rigorous to prepare students for college or an occupation, minorities and poor children receive substandard education, and the special needs of gifted, handicapped, and slow-to-learn children are neglected.

A state in which 11.7 percent of blacks, 10.2 percent of Hispanics, and 5.4 percent of all students attending public schools drop out before graduation cannot expect to compete effectively in the national and world markets of the 21st century. If Michigan is to survive the decline of manufacturing--the mainstay of our economy for the past sixty years--and prosper and grow, we must harvest our genius, not discard it. "Dropout" is a word of failure not only for the student but also for society.

In a democratic society, individuals choose their professions, social activities, religious beliefs, and political affiliations according to their own tastes and talents. The time has come when the structure and style of public education also must allow for diversity and individual choice.

How much individual choice should be permitted in public education, however, is controversial. Some believe that centralized control (little individual choice) is necessary if the mission of K-12 education is to instill a sense of common culture in our children, impress upon them shared standards of behavior, and provide a basic education for every school-age person. Others argue that decentralization is necessary to encourage innovation in the delivery of education, promote competition among schools, increase the responsiveness of schools to their clients' special needs, and allow students and parents to participate actively in determining the kind of education received.

Both arguments have merit and deserve consideration in devising new organizational structures for public education. However, they represent two extremes. Between them are several possibilities warranting exploration. For instance, the public K-12 schools, within an established zone, could operate like higher education institutions. The various schools in the zone would advertise their curricula, the credentials of their administrators and teachers, and the availability of special programs and extracurricular

activities. Students could apply to the school that best suits them and, if accepted, attend as long as the school meets their needs. A student could choose to go to a nearby school or a specialty school, such as one that emphasizes science and mathematics, vocational skills, or the creative and performing arts. The state could either provide parents with vouchers to be used at the public school of choice, or it could make aid payments to the schools based on enrollment, much as is done now. In our opinion, creating an environment of education entrepreneurship and competition could bring about a social result of great import.

In this system, a core curriculum could be devised by a group of state experts, school administrators, teachers, and residents; this would ensure that every student in all zone schools is offered the same basic education. All other decisions regarding the delivery of education would be left to the individual schools. If so desired, a school could contract with a group of teachers to design the noncore curriculum and teach the students, hire a business administrator and perhaps an accountant to run the school and manage the budget, and form a committee of parents, students, local business people, and education experts to review and evaluate the school's performance regularly.

Evaluation of performance could be based, in part, on a state or national competency examination. The purpose of a test similar to the New York Board of Regents' examination would be to focus attention on how well schools and students are meeting their primary goals: teaching and learning skills. It would measure performance and reward achievement. Postsecondary scholarships based on test results would give students an incentive to excel. High numbers of achievers would reflect positively and even profitably on schools, maintaining administrators' and teachers' incentive to excel. Such measures would force schools to be innovative, quality conscious, and accountable. The public should expect no less than the opportunity to judge the performance of students, teachers, and schools.

There are other ways to organize the public K-12 education system: students should be permitted to cross-enroll in several different schools or magnet schools could be established, attracting enrollments from many districts or zones. In a time of rapidly changing social and economic needs, we must recognize that no one system will work for every school and/or school district. The time should be past when there is only one right way to accomplish an objective--especially one as important as education. Standardization in the name of efficiency must be guarded against. Michigan policy makers must continuously explore, study, test, and put into practice new and innovative options.

Funding K-12 Education

We must finance K-12 education more rationally. There are three major problems with our present system. The first is the heavy reliance on property taxes as a funding source for schools. In the decade from 1972 to 1982, the share of financing provided by property taxes increased from 55 percent to 71 percent. The second is disparity in property values among school districts. The third problem is the increase in recent years in the number of

out-of-formula² school districts, which results in their receiving no general membership aid from the state. On the 200th anniversary of the Northwest Ordinance, which provided for public education, it is a disgrace and an outrage that more and more children are denied the opportunity of state support for their schooling. The state School Aid Act, as currently structured, is a living affront to the constitutional intention of providing the opportunity for equal education to everyone. Our public policy and funding strategies should be motivated by policies of inclusion, not exclusion.

There are several continuing factors that add to the problems of school districts: (1) the number of households having school-age children has declined, (2) property taxes are unpopular because of their size and visibility, (3) the property tax is the only major tax currently subject to vote, and (4) there are no other major kinds of taxation available to school districts. These factors make it hard for school districts to generate the additional tax revenue necessary to fund programs. Poor school districts are at a particular disadvantage because they must levy more millage to generate the same revenues as more affluent districts.

There are several critical needs: (1) better equalization of local tax bases, (2) reduced reliance on the property tax as a funding source for schools, (3) a reform of the school aid formula to end the phenomenon of out-of-formula schools, and (4) additional locally controlled revenue sources for school districts, such as district, county, or regionwide income, excise, or sales taxes.

There have been several statewide ballot proposals attempting to switch a portion of school financing from the property tax to the state sales or income tax. The voters rejected all by wide margins. A better approach may be to use state revenues to finance a gradual reduction in school district millage rates, 15 mills over 10 years, for example. Based on current state equalized valuation (SEV), the cost would be \$1.6 billion over the ten-year period. This could be financed with modest increases in current tax rates and tighter controls on state and school district spending. At the same time, districts could be given the authority to adopt, with voter approval, an income, excise, sales, or other tax.

There are several ways to reduce tax base disparities. One would be to institute countywide school districts, as is done in Maryland. In addition to reducing disparities in tax bases, substantial economies could be achieved. A second approach would be to tax industrial and/or commercial property at the state level rather than at the local level, as is currently done with railroad

²Through the school aid formula, the state attempts to equalize the resources of the various school districts caused by differences in the property tax bases. For example, the property tax base in Detroit is about \$25,000 per pupil; in Birmingham it is about \$176,000. This means that 1 mill raises about \$25 in Detroit, but about \$176 in Birmingham. The school aid formula guarantees each district a certain amount of money per pupil less the amount of revenue raised locally. When a school district raises more money locally than the guarantee, it is "out of formula" and receives no state aid. Currently, 159 districts, or about 28 percent of the total, are out of formula.

and telephone property, and redistribute the revenues to the school districts. A third approach would be to tax all property above a certain value at the state level. Recently, two bills (Senate bills 837 and 838) were introduced in the legislature that would create two new classes of property: "regional impact real" and "regional impact personal" (primarily machinery and equipment) consisting of parcels with an SEV of \$10 million or more. The bills would exempt these properties from the local ad valorem tax for local school district operations and provide for the levy of a uniform, specific tax on these properties by the state and for the distribution of this revenue to local school districts. The variance of assessing practices among districts on these large entities creates an injustice and disparity that leads to bad school financing and worse public policy.

Regardless of the option we choose to fund education, one thing is clear--if Michigan is going to improve the quality of education in the 21st century, we must be willing to pay for the necessary changes. The responsibility for funding education can no longer fall primarily on one sector of society--property owners--because every person and business in Michigan will benefit from living and working with competent, informed, and well-educated citizens.

Conclusion

The consequences of neglecting our responsibility to educate all Michigan residents may not be obvious or immediate. However, the absence of good education threatens the cohesiveness of society, exacerbates poverty and crime, and results in an unproductive work force that deteriorates economic competitiveness.

As Michigan moves toward the 21st century, it is imperative that we begin to deal with the problems of producing quality teachers, updating curricula and teaching techniques, lifting stringent regulations that stifle creativity and discourage innovation, increasing education's responsiveness to its clients and society's needs, and providing the funding necessary to ensure everyone access to a good education. We must open our eyes and our minds, become innovative and flexible, and bring our education system out of the 19th century and into the 21st. If we are unwilling to pay the price for excellence, we will inevitably pay a higher price for mediocrity.

Linda Headley, a PSC staff analyst for health and education, joined the editorial group in organizing and preparing this paper.

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This is the final paper in the Debating Michigan's Future series. We hope you have found them useful and thought provoking. The series will be published as a one-volume compendium of the six papers: an overview, economic development, the environment, health, government organization, and education for the 21st century.

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