

MICHIGAN EDUCATION DIGEST

Volume XI, No. 46

Nov. 17, 2009

<http://www.educationreport.org/pubs/med/>

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CHARTERS GAIN MARKET SHARE

FLINT, Mich. – More than one-third of the students who live within Detroit Public Schools boundaries attended a public charter school in 2008-2009, a national report shows. In Flint, about 25 percent of the students attended charters and in Grand Rapids, 17 percent.

Writing about The National Alliance for Public Charters annual report, The Flint Journal noted that Flint ranks eighth in the nation in terms of the percentage of students attending charters. Detroit is third, according to the report, and Grand Rapids ranked 14th, tied with four districts in other states.

New Orleans was No. 1, the report said, where 57 percent of students assigned to the New Orleans Public School System attend charter schools instead.

A Flint Journal review of enrollment at the 10 charter public schools in Genesee County showed a combined increase of 500 students over the previous year. International Academy of Flint gained 100 students alone, and no charter school lost enrollment, The Journal reported.

Enrollment in Flint Community Schools dropped by nearly 1,500 students during the same time period, according to The Journal.

A Flint Community Schools spokesman told The Journal that enrollment did not drop as much as expected and that the district is focusing on delivering a high-quality education as a way of attracting parents.

SOURCES:

The Flint Journal, "Flint ranked No. 8 in nation for percentage of students who live within Flint School District boundaries but attend charter schools," Nov. 12, 2009

http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2009/10/flint_ranks_no_8_in_nation_for.html

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, "Top 10 Charter Communities by Market Share," October 2009

http://www.publiccharters.org/files/publications/MarketShare_P4.pdf

FURTHER READING:

Michigan Education Report, "When we're done with you, you will have options," Sept. 23, 2009
<http://www.educationreport.org/11009>

FLANAGAN: SOLVE YOUR DIFFERENCES

LANSING, Mich. - State school Superintendent Michael Flanagan asked lawmakers and teachers unions Thursday to settle their differences and clear the way for Michigan to apply for up to \$400 million in federal funding for public schools, The Detroit News reported.

To do that, Michigan must open the door to more charter public schools, make it easier for qualified people to become teachers, and connect the dots between individual teachers and their students' performance on standardized tests, The News reported.

The state has until January to submit an application for federal Race to the Top funds, which will be allocated to states primarily on the grounds of how ready they are to implement measures to improve teacher quality, expand use of data and address failing schools.

"We have to have a number of pieces of legislation or we will not win Race to the Top," Flanagan told the House Education Committee, according to The News. "Colorado and some other states are exceeding the requirements."

The Michigan Education Association opposes some of the reform ideas, The News reported.

MEA lobbyist Dave Stafford told the committee that if teachers are evaluated on the basis of student scores, some teachers will be reluctant to take on hard-to-educate students, The News reported.

SOURCE:

The Detroit News, "State schools head urges compromise on reforms," Nov. 13, 2009
<http://www.detnews.com/article/20091113/SCHOOLS/911130368/1408/LOCAL>

FURTHER READING:

Michigan Education Report, "State Ignores \$600 Million for Schools," Nov. 13, 2009
<http://www.educationreport.org/11348>

PANEL WOULD ADVISE ON CONSOLIDATION

LANSING, Mich. - A state representative wants to create an advisory panel to review public school district boundaries and recommend where consolidation or division makes financial sense, according to the (Oakland County) Spinal Column Newsweekly.

Rep. Fred Miller, D-Mount Clemens, said that House Bill 5561 would establish a non-partisan, temporary "School District Modernization Advisory Commission" similar to the advisory panels that recommended military base closings in 2005, Spinal Column reported.

The commission would consist of 15 members representing such stakeholder groups as parents, administrators, teacher unions, school boards and others, the report said.

"This (School District Modernization Advisory) commission is designed to take politics out of the discussion of school district boundaries," Miller said, the Spinal Column reported.

"Some should be consolidated, some annexed, some perhaps even subdivided."

Now in the House Education Committee, the bill would require the panel to report by Aug. 1, 2010.

SOURCE:

(Oakland County) Spinal Column Newsweekly, "Lawmaker wants study on school district changes," Nov. 11, 2009

http://www.spinalcolumnonline.com/Articles-i-2009-11-11-71512.113117_Lawmaker_wants_study_on_school_district_changes.html

FURTHER READING:

Mackinac Center for Public Policy, "School District Consolidation, Size and Spending: An Evaluation," May 22, 2007 <http://www.mackinac.org/8530>

MichiganVotes, "House Bill 5561 (Establish school consolidation study commission)," Oct. 28, 2009

<http://www.michiganvotes.org/2009-HB-5561>

NEW LIFE FOR SCHOOL VOUCHERS?

LANSING, Mich. - The former state superintendent of schools says that taxpayers fed up with status quo in education might be willing to support a school voucher program in Michigan.

Writing in Dome magazine, Tom Watkins said that while voters turned down a voucher initiative in Michigan in 2000, they will have the chance in November 2010 to vote on holding a constitutional convention and rewriting the state Constitution.

That could include amending the prohibition on using government tax support for private or religious schools.

Watkins was state superintendent of public instruction from 2001 to 2005 and now is an education and business consultant in the United States and China.

Michigan residents are willing to invest in public education, Watkins said, but they question whether the current system turns out students prepared to compete in a global economy.

Watkins has called for varied reforms in public education and education funding at least since 2004, among them health care and pension reform, school district consolidation and shared services.

He also has suggested eliminating 12th grade, reducing college tuition rates for students going into high-demand jobs and offering the equivalent of a freshman or sophomore year of college through e-

learning, according to a series of reform ideas published by The Detroit News.

SOURCES:

The Detroit News, "50 Ideas to Fix Michigan," Nov. 17, 2009
<http://detnews.com/article/20091117/OPINION01/911170312>

Dome, "New opening for school vouchers," Nov. 13, 2009
<http://domemagazine.com/tomwatkins/tw1109>

FURTHER READING:

Michigan Education Report, "Retirement fund losses will cost schools, but how much?" April 20, 2009
<http://www.educationreport.org/10454>

HEALTH INSURANCE HOLDS UP CONTRACTS

HARPER WOODS, Mich. - Health insurance is a sticking point in contract negotiations for at least four southeast Michigan public school districts, the Detroit Free Press reported.

Harper Woods, Woodhaven-Brownstown, Southfield and Redford Union school districts all told the Free Press that they have not come to agreement with their teachers' unions on health care plans or payments.

In Redford Union, the district wants teachers to pay \$1,500 annually toward their own health insurance premium. Teachers currently do not contribute any amount, the Free Press reported.

Woodhaven-Brownstown wants to insure teachers through a self-funded trust, but teachers are worried the trust won't have enough money, according to the Free Press, while Southfield wants to cap the district's payment for health insurance and require employees to pay the difference if premiums exceed the cap.

Harper Woods is still negotiating over insurance, salaries, the school calendar and trimester scheduling, the Free Press reported.

SOURCE:

Detroit Free Press, "Harper Woods joins MEA no-progress list," Nov. 16, 2009
<http://www.freep.com/article/20091116/NEWS05/911160371/1322/Harper-Woods-joins-MEA-no-progress-list>

FURTHER READING:

Mackinac Center for Public Policy, "Health Savings Accounts Can Save Michigan Money," Nov. 9, 2009
<http://www.mackinac.org/11294>

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