

POINTS OF VIEW

More money won't repair our 'broken' schools

As our state Legislature debates the future funding of our schools in Michigan, I would like to educate the readers about the recent history of state support for kindergarten through 12th grade education in Michigan.

Contrary to popular belief as disseminated by the Michigan Education Association and its fellow travelers, the people of the state of Michigan have not been parsimonious when it comes to state aid for kindergarten through 12th grade education.

In the 1982-83 fiscal year, total state aid to kindergarten through 12th grade education was \$1.23 billion. Ten years later after all of the alleged cuts, total state aid to kindergarten through 12th grade education in the 1992-93 fiscal year will amount to \$3.051 billion.

This is a 148.1 percent increase during a period when inflation as mea-

sured by the Detroit CPI is up only 40.3 percent.


In other words, instead of decreasing, state aid to education increased 108 percent faster than inflation when the popular perception is that the state of Michigan has been cutting its support to kindergarten through 12th grade education. These figures come from the Senate Fiscal Agency.

As pointed out by Phil Power in his July 29 column in this paper, total student enrollment in kindergarten through 12th grade education in Michigan has dropped 25 percent in the last 15 years.

Power also points out that the quality of education in Michigan, as measured by test scores, has at best stayed level and at worst declined during this period.

As the Legislature debates the future funding of education in Michigan, it is

GUEST COLUMNIST



JAMES BROZOVICH

obvious that there is a significant room for improvement in the system, both in terms of student outcomes and in money input.

The problem is not that we don't spend enough money on education in

this state, but rather, it is that we are not getting our money's worth from a fragmented, unresponsive government owned and operated monopoly school system.

It is not my purpose here to suggest specific ways how we can cut state spending on education, but rather to point out to our elected officials that the current system is broken and more money will not fix it.

They must find a solution to the two current trends that are destroying our public education system. These are ever increasing funding buying ever decreasing quality.

Some obvious areas to look at for savings are: Do we need 572 school districts in Michigan? Does every county need an intermediate school district? What do these intermediate school districts do anyway?

Privatization of many functions such

as food service, transportation and maintenance could lead to significant savings.

Also empowering parents with some sort of voucher system would certainly set competitive forces in motion that will help us achieve our goal of increasing education quality at lower cost.

If the state restores dollar-for-dollar the \$6 billion cut from school financing, we will know that they will have failed to reform an antiquated, cash-sucking wasteful system, and we will only be getting more of the same with just another way to gouge the taxpayers for a system that does not respond to its customer's needs.

James N. Brozovich, a 15-year Farmington Hills resident, manages a firm that provides market research for auto suppliers. He is a member of The Committee to Eliminate Government Waste.

Problems make a voucher system unworkable

QUESTION: There is a lot of talk about citizens having a right to select the school district they want for their child in the schools of choice/voucher program. I've heard plenty from the supporters of these concepts, but what are the basic problems that will need to be faced?


ANSWER: Let's say schools of choice becomes a reality, meaning parents can select the school district they want their child to attend. And let's say hundreds of parents in the Taylor or Wayne Westland School District decide they want their children in the Plymouth School District (or vice-versa), or hundreds of parents in Pontiac want their students in the Bloomfield Hills or West Bloomfield School District.

We have a minor problem. The receiving districts, Plymouth or West Bloomfield's school buildings are presently full of student and there isn't room for a hundred or more students.

A solution could be the districts sending students, i.e. Pontiac, renting a massive crane to pick up one of their elementary school buildings, setting it on a massive U-Haul driving it to Bloomfield Hills, finding some (donated) vacant land and turning on the lights. Sorry, it is too much of a task to move a building from "Ploorsville" to "Richville," so where are the additional facilities coming from?

And if an exodus of school children does transpire from one community to another community, who pays for the extra buses to haul the kids — the sending district or the receiving district?

These are just a few "minor" problems for those who believe schools of choice will improve competition between school districts, driving the "bad" districts out of business and improving a child's education. It is not practical and won't work. Consolidation of school districts may occur, but



DOC DOYLE

schools of choice? I doubt it.

And, yes, I recognize a money voucher will probably go with the child. My guess is the voucher would be between \$3,000 and \$5,000 per student.

The question then is: If the receiving school district is spending \$8,500 per student and if a hundred students move into its district with \$3,500, who makes up the \$5,000 deficit per student for a total \$500,000 tab?

You got it — the local taxpayers in

"Richville" will suddenly find themselves handed the bill to make up the difference or else start to live with a mediocre program.

School of choice advocates say they are equalizing educational opportunity, and that may be true. But it will be paid for by those school districts with more money who now will pay not only their own children's education, but their neighbors' children as well.

And I guarantee that "Lansing" will allow local districts to raise more money through local taxes over and above the state's present tentative plan (so much money per child).

This governmental thinking is not new. In the '60s, the state mandated and paid for driver education. After a few years, the cost of teaching kids to drive fell upon the local taxpayer. Vocational education, during the Johnson and Kennedy era was funded at about 80 percent; today the state pays about 5 percent.

The same with the most expensive program in education, special education. The federal law says that states only have to provide services from ages 6 to 20. Michigan legislators passed a law to provide services from 0 to 26. Guess who got tapped with the bill! Local taxpayers.

No one denies the great need for special education for children, but let's be honest. Every program started by our leaders is eventually dumped on the local taxpayer who, in turn, believes the local school district administration is the money-grabbing one at fault.

So I wouldn't get too excited about the school of choice issue yet. There are, as you pointed out, many factors to be considered, some of which are not resolvable.

James "Doc" Doyle, a former teacher/school administrator/university instructor, is president of Doyle and Associates, an educational consulting firm.

LETTERS

Riegle take note

Sen. Don Riegle's letter dated July 23 and subsequent television appearances by Bob Kerrey and a host of other Democrats are already playing the "CYA game" or "cov-

er your ass" for the vote confiscating more of productive citizens income. The money that I will lose each month is what I and millions of other Americans would have used to make purchases, purchases of goods and services that make the engine of our econ-

omy run and grow. Clinton may have proposed it. But you, Don, are the one who voted for it.

I was walking down the street in San Francisco a couple days ago and someone says to me, "Hey buddy, can you give me your change?"

I'm sure, Sen. Riegle, that you have seen some of these people from your limo window in the streets of Washington, D.C. people who believe it's more fashionable to beg than to work.

I answered him, "Sorry buddy, the Democrats just confiscated my money.

Besides, they're going to give you a job soon." He wasn't impressed.

Neither am I. Can I suggest a good resume service, Don?

Howard C. Gilbertson, Birmingham

State arts funding leads to verbal legislative fisticuffs

If you want to get into a fist fight, tell people in western Michigan that the Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Zoo, Detroit Historical Museum and the Edison Institute are state jewels which the state should pay for.

"Regional facilities should be supported on a regional basis," warned a Grand Rapids area legislator as he tried to cut funding for the aforementioned sacred cattle. What he's saying is that metropolitan Detroit benefits most from these cultural cows, and he's tired of funding what his folks don't consider sacred.

The \$29 million cultural aid bill won 81 to 18 approval in the state House of Representatives. But the truth is that if there hadn't been a few million for the Grand Rapids Museum, which folks around here hardly consider a state asset, the whole bill might have gone down.

In short, we in southeast Michigan had best consider supporting regional cultural institutions ourselves.

We got into this mess in the mid 1970s, when Detroit Mayor Coleman Young decided European-oriented culture wasn't his city's priority. Young cut Detroit's contribution to the world class Institute of Arts to the vanishing point. He precipitated the Detroit Symphony crisis of four or five years ago by withholding its grant.

Under Gov. William G. Milliken, the state began giving "equity" grants to Detroit area culture, starting at \$9.7 million and reaching a high of \$32.4 million in the late 1980s. At one point, the state even gave Young \$10 million of highway money for the zoo.

Then the economic roof caved in. Gov. John Engler is pictured as a mean-spirited country and western lout for cutting arts funding. But if Beethoven or Botticelli were governor, the arts couldn't have fared any better.

Citizens Research Council of Michigan, an independent outfit with some intellectual clout, rejuvenated an idea some of us have had for 15 or so years — a multi-county agency to support the arts. It suggested the United Way approach

to fund-rising, with one organization serving everything.

CRG projected some tax rates that Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties could levy to raise \$50 million for the cultural institutions.

Examples:

- Property tax — 0.745 mills.
- Personal income tax — 0.11 percent.
- Sales tax — 0.163 percent.
- Single business tax — 0.14 percent.
- Amusement and recreation services tax — 5.7 percent.

State Rep. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, has trouble with any governmental funding of the arts. Kaza is no redneck. He trotted out remarks of many artistic greats in support of his view, notably novelist John Updike: "I would rather have as my patrons a host of anonymous citizens digging into their own pockets for the price of a book or magazine than a small body of enlightened and responsible men administering public funds."

But I fear the Kaza-Updike view ignores an economic reality: The works of Rembrandt and Rachmaninoff will be unavailable to Americans without government money.

We had better come up with a method besides the state budget, or kiss our fine arts heritage goodbye.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. His office number is (313) 3491700.

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