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# Opinion

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# Schools must make decisions now

Nick Sharkey

COMMENTS OF school officals:

● *A radical departure from the historic position of the Michigan Department of Education.*

*— Timothy Dyer, superintendent of Wayne-Westland School District.*

● *It's almost as if the state looked at our requirements and copied them.*

*— Zelda Robinson, president, Southfield school board.*

● *My concern when all this started coming out was that we'd have a knee-jerk reaction.*

*— Richard Wallace, Farmington school trustee.*

● *What they're doing is bringing the state board more and more into the operation of local school districts.*

*— Kenneth Erickson, superintendent of Redford Union school district.*

What's all the fuss over? The answer is the recent release of a report by state Superintendent Philip Runkel called "Better Education for Michigan Citizens: A Blueprint for Action, the Michigan State Board of Education Plan."

Runkel made a series of recommendations for improving kindergarten through 12th-grade education over the next four years.

His plan would toughen graduation requirements by mandating four credits of English, two credits of mathematics, two credits of science, three credits of social science, two credits of a foreign language or fine arts course, one credit of physical education and a half credit of computer education.

The state requires a student to take only one-half credit of civics.

Runkel calls for extending the school year by 20 days and the school day to six class hours. It recommends teaching qualifications.

THIS REPORT culminated a year of strong published criticisms of schools.

The opening salvo last spring was a federal study of schools called "A Nation at Risk." It charged our nation's schools are threatened by a "rising tide of mediocrity." Several similar reports followed.

Most noted that scores on standardized tests given to high school seniors have fallen over the past 20 years. They indicated that in most countries, students attend classes longer than the 180 days required in the United States.

Predictably, this criticism has drawn the ire of local school officials. Some have dredged out the argument of "local autonomy." Others have cited money problems. Some say, "We're doing a great job: the other guy has problems."

ALL SUCH responses miss the point. Local districts do have much flexibility, but by the Michigan Constitution, the responsibility for public education rests with the State Board of Education.

Michigan and local school districts will have money problems for many years. That doesn't mean steps shouldn't be taken to improve local education.

Finally, districts can't be complacent and point fingers at the "other guy." Every district must make improvements.

Two themes emerge from the spotlight on public education.

*First, a school district must come up with a specific plan for its future.* For example, Wayne-Westland recently established five- and 10-year goals. These incorporate the proposals made in "A Nation at Risk" and in ". . . A Blueprint for Action."

"Because of the district's planning, how a student is doing according to the set criteria is known throughout the year," said Dr. Clarice Stafford, assistant superindent for curriculum in Wayne-Westland.

Second, any improvements in local education will come only as a result of the cooperation on a wide range of persons: educators, parents, residents, local school boards, industry and government.

## oral quarrel

# Calls split on USFL

This week's Oral Quarrel question asked readers if the United States Football League games would hold their interest through the coming months.

Following are the responses:

●

Yes, *especially after the* Panthers did so well last year.

●

Football is football. I have had enough through college and professional games. I am looking forward to baseball. I can't see this USFL. That is too much football in one year. They are killing it.

●

No.

●

Most definitely. It will be fun to watch football in a non-traditionally football season and it should be a lot of fun.

●

No, it will certainly not.

●

All five of us in our family will be watching the Michigan Panthers in the USFL all summer.

●

We are already inundated with football games on TV and the USFL games being shown through July is a pain in the neck as far as I am concerned. There are just too many sports shown on TV interferring with regular programming.

●

Yes.

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