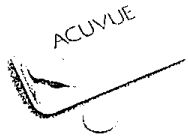




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Report: City schools need suburban help

By Wayne Peal
staff writer

Suburban school districts must "give something back" to the Detroit public schools, according to a new report expected to shape Michigan education policy in the 1990s.

Cooperative efforts must begin between Detroit and its suburban neighbors for Michigan to remain economically competitive, according to a report compiled by nationally-recognized demographics expert Harold Hodgkinson.

Regional magnet schools for academically-talented students located in Detroit, staffed by suburban districts and drawing students from both — were among Hodgkinson's recommendations.

"I'M NOT suggesting equalization, but something must be done for one to assist the other," he said.

Middle class flight — both white and black — has placed Detroit students in jeopardy, he said.

"There's nobody left in the city who has benefited from education," Hodgkinson said. "But the drug benefits are there."

The report was issued Thursday. State Superintendent of Schools Donald Bemis hailed it as "an incredibly important document" that would be used to shape education policy in Michigan.

Metro Detroit's racial polarization — with suburbs predominantly white and the inner city predominantly black, compounds the situation, Hodgkinson said.

Multicultural school communities such as San Diego, where Hispanic and Asian students also form a sizable contingent — have generally had more success in developing regional programs.

State School Board member Marilyn Landy of Grosse Pointe said the

survey ideas were worth exploring. "I like the idea of cooperation," she said. "But selling it is going to be difficult."

Wayne County Intermediate Schools Superintendent William Simmons agreed.

"It's such a departure from tradition," he said. "Plus, you're flying in the face of a lot of political concerns."

Rochester Schools Assistant Superintendent John Telford is well aware of how sensitive area racial issues are in metro Detroit.

Telford received "hate mail like you wouldn't believe" after making a similar call for suburban-urban cooperation four years ago in a Detroit daily newspaper. At the time, Telford added, he received death threats and had gunshots fired at his house.

Yet, he remains undeterred in his belief that suburban-urban cooperation is a key to Michigan's future success.

"I'm totally in support of the concept," Telford said. "Any opportunity you have to foster understanding is welcome."

Toward that end, he's helped develop programs geared to promote racial and ethnic understanding among Rochester middle school students. He also assisted in cooperative efforts sponsored by Oakland University.

Providing a better education for urban students, Telford said, is not only ethical, but practical.

"In the near future, half the work force will be minorities," he said. "I tell people over and over that if these people cannot hold jobs, who is going to be there to pay for your retirement?"

Suburban-urban cooperation isn't the only answer to Michigan's educational problems, Hodgkinson said, but "an arrow in the quiver."

Other recommendations include:

- A long-term commitment to lowering high school dropout rates, equal to that currently being made to expand Michigan prisons. Greater cooperation among school districts, colleges and businesses to boost "quality education" is needed.

- Increasing small business start-ups, especially among minority business owners and among businesses that serve the elderly. Michigan's future, Hodgkinson said, includes more retired auto workers and fewer families with young children.

- Creating special Head Start-style programs to accommodate the needs of single mothers. Hodgkinson's survey found that one out of every four Michigan children are being raised by a single mother.

- New educational programs, including greater use of television, to reach children in isolated, non-metropolitan districts.

New education spending, he said, must be matched by an increased commitment to health care, housing, jobs and transportation.

"You can't just concentrate on education and leave the rest alone," Hodgkinson said.

While an advocate of school-choice, Hodgkinson said Minnesota's pioneering effort in erasing district boundaries has been a disappointment.

"The notion that choice enables good schools to drive out bad schools doesn't seem to be the case," he said.

The report was prepared through the Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

... and, 'rust belt' is dead

The "rust belt" is dead, at least for metropolitan Detroit, according to Hodgkinson's survey.

The Washington, D.C.-based demographer said he found conclusive evidence that metropolitan Detroit produced more new jobs — and at a faster rate — than many other regions of the country.

Metro employment growth averaged 4.7 percent a year for the peri-

od 1982-87, according to information cited by Hodgkinson, outpacing state and national averages.

But Hodgkinson added that employment growth is threatened by the relatively low education levels of the Detroit work force. Nearly one-third of the metro region's adult population has not completed high school — above the 29 percent average for the nation's 100 largest met-

ropolitan regions. Metro Detroit also ranks 87th among the top 100 regions in terms of college attendance. Demographic information Hodgkinson cited as significant for Wayne County.

- Retirees, especially those from auto industry jobs, make up a growing percentage of county population. Wayne County already ranks fourth in the nation in terms of Social Security transfer payments, he said.

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