

Schools to track 'employability'

By Tim Richard
staff writer

In the future Michigan students will get a new kind of report card. It will show not only their course grades but also an "employability skills profile."

Even kids bound for college will get one.

So will girls who expect to be homemakers.

"You're starting your resume," explained Patrick Donahue, an assistant superintendent of Huron Valley (Milford) Schools and member of a State Board of Education advisory group.

"It's a profile that you're supposed to use throughout high school and onto what you do next in life, whether that's further education or to go out to get a job. Hopefully, ninth graders will wake up and say 'Whoo, this is what I should be doing.'"

EMPLOYERS who had a role in designing the portfolio (see box) disapproved the adage "You teach 'em to read and write, and we'll teach the job." On the contrary, a task force of employers called for the inclusion of specific skills beyond the three R's.

Beginning next fall, every Michigan public school 10th grader will start assembling an employability skills portfolio with three files.

ACADEMIC

- Read and understand written materials, charts and graphs.
- Understand basic math and use it to solve problems.
- Use research and library skills.
- Use specialized knowledge, skills, tools and equipment to get a job done.
- Speak and write in the language in which business is conducted.
- Use scientific method to solve problems.

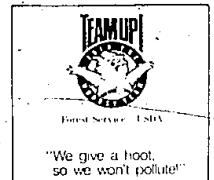
PERSONAL MANAGEMENT

- Attend school (work) daily and on time.
- Meet deadlines.
- Develop career plans. Know personal strengths and weaknesses.
- Demonstrate self-control.
- Pay attention to details.
- Follow instructions and directions.
- Work without supervision.
- Learn new skills.
- Identify and suggest new ways to get the job done.

TEAMWORK

- Actively participate in a group. Listen to other members. Express ideas to other members.
- Know the group's rules and values.
- Be sensitive to the group members' ideas and views. Be willing to compromise if necessary to best accomplish the goal.
- Be a leader or follower to best accomplish the goal.
- Work in changing settings and with people of differing backgrounds.

Source: Michigan Department of Education

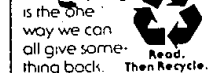


WE'RE CONCERNED ABOUT YESTERDAY'S NEWS.

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Because the state-mandated portfolio will require an unprecedented amount of cooperation between schools and employers, they are being introduced gradually. Last year there were 23 programs in pilot districts (none in this area). This year there will be 100 and next fall portfolios will be kept for all 10th graders in the state. In 1993 all ninth graders and in 1994 all eighth graders will be incorporated into the program.

It's all in the state school aid act passed last week by the Legislature.

THE PORTFOLIO comprises three file folders — one for academic, personal management and teamwork skills — which by law parents (or guardians) may review. The portfolio is given to the student at graduation or when he or she leaves the district.

It can contain records of standard aptitude tests, career exploration, vocational training, job-seeking training, job experience, problem solving experience — and non-academic awards — anything that will document a child's skills.

"It has no boundaries, and it doesn't set minimum levels," said

Paul Stemmer, a state Department of Education staffer working on the project.

The payoff comes when the student seeks a job and has something to show an employer.

THERE HAVE been problems in the pilot districts.

Some schools didn't get strong business involvement. Storing the records took up space. Security of records was a concern. Some teachers worried about workloads.

And since kids learn outside of class, too, the question of integrating documents from Junior Achievement, Scouts, 4-H, church groups and civic organizations became a concern.

Stemmer said portfolio usage tended to be more difficult for "at-risk" students — those with poor academic histories.

A second-year goal will be to implement a scoring system, a method of converting results to numbers, that will give both the schools and the state feedback on the program's success.

STEAMER CREDITS Colorado will be the first to set up an employability skills project, an idea that wasn't mentioned in the federal government's landmark 1983 "A Nation at Risk" report on education. Some Michigan districts began compiling portfolios on their own but now must integrate their systems with the state's.

The movement toward tracking job skills grew out of a belief that the state needed to define a core curriculum.

In 1988, I was one of a group of state board members from 18 states who thought that if we could define outcomes which students should achieve from schooling — what they should know and be able to do, and the kind of people they should be — we would be able to define a core curriculum," said Dorothy Beardmore, president of the State Board of Education.

Govs. James Blanchard and John Engler both made the employability concept part of their education programs.

Tax foes take aim at recycling fees

Rumblings of possible litigation against several Oakland County communities surfaced last week as opponents of mandatory fees for curbside recycling programs got advice on their legal options.

Organizers are gathering tonight at Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance in Farmington Hills, the home of tax-cut guru Richard Headlee who has voiced his opposition to the fees, claiming they are really disguised taxes.

Though organizers won't confirm they will file suit, Birmingham attorneys John Anderson and Mike Legg are expected to attend tonight's 7 p.m. meeting to speak and

"discuss options" with those attending, said Alexander Hamilton's Patrick Anderson. "If they (the cities) insist on doing this (the mandatory fees), we don't have any choice," he added.

ANDERSON SAID any suit would likely be filed in the Michigan Court of Appeals, which is allowed under the Headlee Amendment.

Anderson, an economist for the Hills insurance company, spoke out recently against such mandatory recycling fees in Farmington and Farmington Hills, asking leaders there to halt the fees and put the issue before voters.

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