

## POINTS OF VIEW

# Proceed with caution when privatizing schools

It's an interesting question. I don't know the ramifications," a plain-speaking Robert Roy, Ed.D., said several times during our interview.

Roy is the new (since July) superintendent of Pinckney Community Schools. That's the Livingston County school district seriously considering "privatizing" — hiring a business called Educational Alternatives Inc. (EAI) to operate the schools.

My questions (on the Sept. 4 WKYC-TV Channel 7 show "Spotlight on News") focused on the public's right to information about their schools if a private business runs them.

One or more members of the Pinckney school board have an ideological agenda — to privatize for the sake of privatizing because all government is bad and all business is good. They obviously are wired into the Mackinac Center, the Midland think tank whose essays constantly bash public schools and extol the virtues of "choice" and private schools.

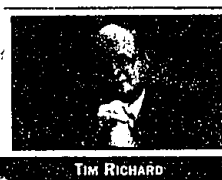
Neither Rob Roy nor Larry Beckett, the new business manager, knew who

was providing the ideological thrust. Roy intends to make a yes-or-no recommendation on privatizing to the board by Dec. 31.

Roy seems to be a common-sense guy, not an ideologue: "Privatization is a tool that can be used to free up money that can be put back into the curriculum. I'm an advocate of privatization to the extent that it's a valuable tool. I don't believe in privatization for the sake of privatization. It has to have a purpose and a function.

"I was hired to take an outside look — stand back from the emotionalism that has taken place in this school district. In the process, I am not only examining EAI's but also the MEA (union) proposal," Roy said. He wants a lot more detail from EAI and MEA about operations, goals and accountability before he recommends anything.

"Privatization" is a buzzword in Michigan. In these years of expensive public employee union contracts. But business and government are different creatures. In Roy's words, "Now we're



TIM RICHARD

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working with a private corporation in a marriage with a public corporation."

Some unanswered questions in a privatized situation:

■ If administrators fire an employee or expel a student, does that person still have a right to a public hearing before the board under the Open Meetings Act?

■ If parents have gripes about school boundaries or bus routes, can they appeal to their elected board of education for changes?

■ Will the corporation still release MEAP scores and annual improvement plans as required under PA 257?

■ What does the elected board do about curriculum and other matters once a private corporation is in charge?

■ What does the superintendent do?

■ What happens if voters throw out a majority of the current board? (They elected two anti-EAI candidates last June.)

We have reason to be suspicious of the current Pinckney board majority, which twice has been hauled into court over the Open Meetings Act. Once the

board was spanked for a closed meeting with EAI.

A week ago, the Pinckney board set up an open meeting suit by paying \$13,500 to plaintiff Charles Porter. He argued the board violated OMA by holding a closed disciplinary session on the previous superintendent.

What's particularly bothersome was board member Richard Baumgartner's defiant response to the Brighton Argus. He insisted the board had done nothing wrong and that the courts have a "bias" in favor of anyone who sues the board.

Using Orwellian double-think, Baumgartner said, "That's the malice of the complaint... Charles Porter (plaintiff) cost the taxpayers money."

Privatization could be dangerous when a board has such a public-behavior attitude.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1831.

## Outcome based education can be a hindrance to free thought

By BOBBIE CLEARY

I found Tim Richard's article on Engler's opposition to outcome based education inaccurate. OBE is not about partisan politics at all.

Outcome based education, also known as mastery learning or Skinnerianism, has been around for some time. Skinner claimed that he could train a rat or a pigeon to read if he simply reinforced positive behavior and punished negative behavior at the proper time.

That, in essence, is the character of OBE: It consists of mindless training and endless behavior modification. Children who are constantly trained by mastery learning curriculum, even the ones used by Christian schools, simply cannot think for themselves, despite all the rhetoric the schools chant about critical thinking.

Since 1965 when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed at the federal level, education has been on a rapid downhill slide. As the federal government has been researching innovations in education (all of them being OBE),

### GUEST COLUMN

they have concurrently tracked the changes different curricula have effected in the attitudes and values of students.

This is why when Dr. John Hoben promoted OBE in Plymouth-Canton Schools, he knew a new technology package was needed. This is a very individual child can be eventually computerized and tracked to see how they are progressing "developmentally." Are they becoming the type of people a large central government wants? The National Diffusion Network has been amassing numerous "validated" programs since 1965, validated to effect prescribed changes in attitudes and values.

When former President George Bush met with then Gov. Bill Clinton and the other governors for a conference on education, America 2000 was born, a supposed Republican reform. When Bill Clinton was elected, the plan changed in name only. Neither party wanted to give up the increased power grab for the fed-

eral government.

The planners of Goals 2000 own the minds of the future of our country. They hold the power to decide which behaviors and attitudes are acceptable and which are punishable. Once business and education links are completed, the average citizen's child will simply be a "human resource" to fill the slot that government and business have collaboratively deemed in their best interests.

You can be sure free thinkers and independents will be punished. I.e., found only fit to shovel manure. It is a more subtle form of a controlled society than the USSR ever attempted.

OBE is not about conservatism or liberalism. It is about being able to think and choose freely for oneself, as opposed to the government determining the outcome of every student's life.

Bobbie Cleary is a Canton resident. The Observer uses guest columns on a regular basis. For more information about writing one, contact Jeff Counts, the editor, at 459-2700.

### Vote 'no' Nov. 8

A recent report by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners revealed that Michigan's automobile insurance companies received the highest profits in the nation in 1992. Their profit of 22 percent was twice the national average. The powerful insurance lobby is again leading the parade to increase their profits by telling the people to vote yes on proposal "C."

In March 1993 the state Legislature and the governor approved Public Act 43, which was scheduled to take effect April 1, 1994. This proposed new law provides a temporary rate reduction of 16 percent in auto insurance rates. After six months, the auto insurance companies could increase the rates at their discretion and wash out the 16-percent rate reduction. This proposed new law eliminates many permanent medical benefits which would reduce costs to the insurance companies and again increase their profits at the expense of the consumers.

This proposed new law, if approved by the voters at the November general

election, would:

- Trade permanent medical benefits for a temporary rate decrease.
- Permit the insurance commissioner to waive the insurance companies' obligation to reduce their rates.
- Limit treatment an injured person could receive, and limit the fees paid to health care providers.
- Limit the right to sue and prevent drivers over 50 percent at fault from collecting any damages.

Since the auto insurance companies are already receiving the highest profits in the nation, it is difficult for me to understand why they are spending \$8 million to feed the people a lot of false claims and convince them to approve auto insurance proposal "C."

Don't be deceived. Vote "No" on Nov. 8, and retain a good no-fault auto insurance system.

John Bennett  
Northville

John Bennett is a former state legislator from Redford Township. He served for 28 years in the state House and is a former member of the House Insurance Committee.

## Michigan's public schools under a fateful microscope

Summer's over. It's back to school for hundreds of thousands of kids who will be once again a battleground in the continuing war over the future of public schools in Michigan.

I don't want to sound too alarmist, but I suspect that the next five years or so are going to be crucial to the fate of a public school system that has served our children well for most of its 150-year history but has come on hard times in recent years.

Today, many parents and most employers believe that the schools provide neither the academic rigor to prepare our kids to compete in a rapidly globalizing economy nor the grounding in values to guide them for good citizenship.

And so the general cry has arisen to reform the schools. Not surprisingly, it has taken many forms.

One Michigan district, Pinckney, is considering privatizing, turning over management of the schools to a corporation, Educational Alternatives Inc. That might be a good idea, but see Tim Richard's column on the same page of this newspaper for a list of questions that should be asked before taking the plunge.

Charter schools are another experiment sanctioned by the passage of Proposal A. The Noah Webster Academy, headquartered in Ionia County, starts this fall a statewide network of 1,500 home-schooled children connected with teachers through correspondence, telephone and computers.

Charter schools like Noah Webster are supposed to receive \$5,500 per student, the same per-pupil funding that goes to other schools. A legal challenge, however, has been filed arguing that the school violates a constitutional prohibition against spending public money on private schools.

These various experiments have received a lot of media attention, often at the expense of some very serious and far-reaching reforms already set in place by the Legislature and the State Board of Education.

Did you know, for example, that the academic performance for all kids in Michigan schools is assessed three times before graduation? And did you know that the results of these MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program)



PHILIP POWER

tests are published, school by school, in this newspaper? And did you know that most schools, embarrassed by poor scores, are busy changing teaching methods and materials in order to improve?

Did you know that all schools will be required by 1997 to implement an academic core curriculum, complete with performance level standards? Hearings at various locations around the state on these proposed core academic outcomes will start this November.

And did you know that these various assessment devices are now being used to endorse diplomats, so parents and employers can get a good idea of just how well graduates did in their academic work?

All schools are required to prepare for public disclosure this fall an annual plan for improvement. How about that?

The point of this recital is that a whole lot of work is already under way to improve our schools. It won't happen overnight, but the foundation for serious reform is being laid by some thoughtful people on the State Board of Education and by Bob Schiller, the state superintendent of public instruction.

I suppose I can't as easily in the media as fights over privatization in Pinckney or suits against the Noah Webster Academy, but it would be a big mistake to overlook the solid reality of change that is taking place right before our eyes.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

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