### **POINTS OF VIEW**

# Hunches, research face off in school debate

ompetition" and "cholce" are two jargon words you'll hear re-peatedly, if you listen to the far right wing of educational politics.

Their hypothesis says that if schools must compete for students, and if parents have a choice of where to send their kids, then education will improve.

I call it a hypothesis, not a theory. A
hypothesis is a glorified hunch about
something that might be true, but so
far there is little factual matter to support it. It should be distinguished from
a theory, a general principle abstracted
from a body of facts.

from a body of tacts.
Under the right wing hypothesis, the
State Board of Education, with the
heavy-handed prodding of Clark Durant, has been advancing an ideological
agenda that would undo meny public
school reforms of the past decade. On the sidelines, cheering, is Senate ma-jority leader Dick Posthumus.

And so we are bombarded with rec-ommendations for public school acade-mies that would be free from rigid rules

(we sren't told which rules are rigid and why the rules can't be changed), streamlined teacher certification, schools of choice, new forms of gover-

nance, and so on.
Durant even brought in a Wisconsin professor, Howard Fuller, who advocated a pell-mell rush into chartering. Naturally, Fuller had no results from his last job as Milwaukee superintendent to share with Michigan. Naturally, Durant invited in no one who disagreed with his hypothesis. nance, and so on.

One gets the distinct impression they have no research, no experience, no facts, to support their ideology.

"This has not been thought through," said Dorothy Beardmore, State Board member from Rochester and one of the few voices of sanity in the Republican Party. (Actually, the majority of the GOP probably believes Durant's hypotheses are inflated rhetoric, but only a few brave souls like Dorothy Beardmore will say so aloud.) Julius Maddox, president of the



TIM RICHARD

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Michigan Education Association, a union that is often selfish but some-times wise, called for "sound, research-based" study before the state dives based" study before the state dive blindly into the depths of new hy-

potheses.

Rep. James Agee, D. Muskegon, minority vice chair of the House Education Committee, issued a rebuttal report to the Durant notions. Agee constantly stressed existing studies,
quotes from expert testimony, and the
need for research before the fate of 1.6
million public school pupils is sacrificed on the altar of untested "competition" rhetoric.

So why do Durant and his sheepish followers — Marilyn Lundy, Gary Wol-fram, Sharon Wise and Ruth Braun — want to ram these hypotheses into law and practice?

A teacher from Zeeland may have put his finger on it. Dirk Koorstra ex-pressed a fear that the kind of autono-mous schools Durant advocates "can be controlled by special interests."

In other words, the goal isn't to change the way all 1.6 million public school students are taught. The goal is to bring a few thousand from private achools into the fold and change things

for a few thousand already in public schools under the stern gazo of the churches that guide these enclaves. Clearly the Religious Right — a few fundamentalist Protestant churches that want to impose their sectarian practices on everyone through the force of school government — have been exposed and have had little luck taking over boards of education.

So they are endeavoring to fractionalize school districts with "charter academies," autonomous schools and such gimmicks, to create their little fieldoms — at \$5,000-plus a year per pupil from the state treasury.

All this stuff about "competition" and "choice" and "freedom" and "market place" is slick hypothesizing. They have their authoritarian agendas, and with God's presumed blessing, they see no need to do reacarch for the rest of us.

Tim Richard reports on the local im-

Tim Richard reports on the local im-plications of state and regional events.' His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1881.

## LETTERS

## Arena flap?

he long-awaited 1995-96 Farm-ington Hills hockey season will soon be under way. This should de an exciling time for the families who worked so hard to see the ice arena be-

worked so hard to see the ice arena be-come a reality.

Instead, many Farmington Hills familles are disappointed because their youths are being turned away from the travel teams and replaced by nonresi-dent players.

dent players.
We were led to believe that the goal of the Farmington Hills Hockey Association was to develop our young resident players and build a reputable organization in our city. The wool has been pulled over our eyes by a group of people who wish to build a winning orcanization at the expense of our resi-

The FHHA board of directors has a responsibility to act in the best interest of the residents of Farmington Hills. After all, if it were not for the residents, the ice arena and the Farmington Hills Hockey Association would still be a

Hockey Association would still to a dream.

A residency rule of 50 percent was instituted to ensure our Farmington Hills players an opportunity to play on travel teams, but few teams have met the 50 percent requirement. A loophole exists whereby coaches have an option of tilling that 50 percent residency in favor of nonresident players.

If a coach feels that he or she hasn't enough quality Farmington Hills players to fill the residency requirement, he or she may ask the board for a dispensation to take on more nonresident players.

Looppholes used

Looppnoies used. When requisted, dispensation is often granted. The FHHA board seems to feel that a travel program made up of experienced nonresident players is somehow in the best interest of the residents. The loophole that they have de-

signed has enabled FHHA travel teams to consist of a large number of nonresi-dent players who have played together in past years.

Many of our resident kids have not

had an opportunity to play travel hock-ey in the past because it is difficult to break into programs as a nonresident in a city where the residency rule may be as high as 76 percent.

be as high as 70 percent.

Our resident players will never become "quality" players if not given the chance to play and develop on travel teams. Our residents deserve first priority, they should not have to step aside for nonresident players.

Travel hockey programs in other cit-s do not bend their rules to accommo Travel hockey programs in ourse to ice do not bend their rules to accommodate our residents, why should we bend ours? Allowing the Farmington Hills residents first priority and adhering to the residency requirement is in the best interest of the residents, catering to nonresident players is not.

A low resident turnout for travel

hockey tryouts is being blamed for the imbalance of the 60 percent residency, although the low turnout really has lit-tle to do with the outcome of the tryouts.

If as few as 10 resident players try out for a travel team needing 14-16 players, a minimum of seven or eight players is needed to fill the 50 percen residency requirement. The moth is simple, there are plenty of residents to fill the teams.

#### Difficult took

The FHHA is new, as are the board members, and the task of building a reputable organization is understandably difficult. But we must realize that a strong and competitive organization cannot be built in one season. When the FHHA was confronted about the residency situation, the members argued their position and dismissed the

They pointed out to me that elec-

tions for new board members will be held in March 1996. Those who feel that our residents are not getting a foir shake should think scriously about running for board positions.

Feedback from other cities concern-Feedback from other cities concerning this issue has been negative. The arena is not even open yet and the FHHA is being criticized for the unfairness to its own residents. Those involved with the hockey passociation should be concerned by this.

The situation should be corrected before it gets worse and jeopardizes the reputation of this organization and its The future of our hockey association

and the welfare of our young hockey players rest on decisions made by the FHHA board, and we're not off to a great start. Cindy Shuster, Farmington Hills

## State's irrational board could destroy education

mary of the recommendations adopted by the State Board of Education at its July and

August meetings:

Repeal the requirement for a tough, mandatory, core curriculum for all K-12 students.

Permit new, autonomous school districts to he corved out of existing ones.

Allow students (together with their basic edu-cation grant) to transfer from their home school district to another one.

Remove the limits, currently 75, on the number of charter schools and make it easier to get

charters approved.
Thoughtful readers of this column will be pleased that board president Clark Durant and his sidekick, Marilyn Lundy, backed away from renulring schools to teach creationism alongsitle evolution.

Durant wanted schools to teach "various the-ories" on the origin of life, not just scientific ones. Lundy argued that since there is no scien-tific evidence for evolution, claims that creatille evidence for evolution, clause that treat-tionism is not supported by scientific evidence are irrelevant. (Adopting the device typically used by felks caught making silly remarks, Lindy later claimed she had been misquoted.) 'Most troublesome was the board's rejection of

a mandatory core curriculum, the necessary pre-condition for real school reform. Business leaders, particularly, have urged tough statewide standards geared to global skills competi-

wide standards geared to global skills competed a tion; and in 1993 the Legislature adopted a package of school reform laws that required each district to follow a core curriculum. Interestingly, the State Board's recommenda-tion runs counter to its own public opinion sur-tey, which indicated that 87 percent of Michi-gan residents think the state should ast educational standards. So much for Durant's claim that the board's very conservative majority is "qu the same wavelength" as the public on edu-cational standards.

What is remarkable overall about the State Bhard's continuing assault on school reform is that it files squarely in the face of a set of com-

o: Our 1995 high school graduates ranked Test (SAT) scores, Michigan's scores in both the math and verbal portions of the SAT have been rising in recent years, although they are



PHILIP POWER

not up to the level reached in the 1950s and

Item: The board's \$620,000 public opinion survey indicated lukewarm (52 percent) support for more schools of choice and a strong (84 percent) endorsement for making charter schools follow the same rules as traditional schools. Yet the board majority wants more schools of choice and easier rules for charter schools.

and easier rules for charter senous.

Item: This school year marks the start of two
more school reforms from the package passed in
1993. Instructional time will rise from 900
hours over a 180-day school year to 990 hours,
while a new proficiency test will replace the
MEAP assessment for 11th graders. The test is
tough; it takes 11 hours and atresses reasoning over multiple-choice questions.

The chasm between the ideologically driven irrationality of the State Board's majority and the steady progress of school reform and the common sense attitudes of most Michigan citicommon sense activates or most mining activates are has grown very wide. Even conservative members admit that their rush to save our public schools by destroying them is driven by fear that the board's right-wing majority may not

unit me noam s night-wing majority may not survive next year's election. I wonder whether Gov. John Engler, now enermously preoccupied with running for vice president, has any idea how much embarrasspresident, has my lose now incut embrass-ment he risks by allowing his hand-picked State Board of Education to gyrate unchecked into outer space. Maybe everybody would be better off if the governor got back to running the state and reigning in some of his extreme



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