

## POINTS OF VIEW

## No research to back 'charter school' claims

**S**uspicion confirmed: The "new majority" on the State Board of Education has no research to back up its repeated assertions that "charter schools" and the "marketplace" will improve education. They simply repeat their ideological mantras without citing a shred of evidence to support them.

The "new majority" is headed by State Board president Clark Durant. His No. 2 is Marilyn Lundy. Both are Detroit-area Republicans. Durant's key aide is Michael David Warren, a lawyer from Southfield who is administrative assistant to the board.

None has any experience on a public school board or in public school administration. It shows.

Others in the "new majority," as it is charitably called, are Gary Wolcott of Hillsdale, Sharon Wise of Owasco and Rusty Bessie of Saginaw. They are essentially Durant's Tory lackeys, to borrow the parliamentary term.

Durant couldn't attend, but Warren and Lundy appeared at a Sept. 28 forum in Birmingham on the changes

they hope to make. They were asked to cite any research that shows the marketplace will weed out bad schools and let good ones survive.

"I look at the history of western civilization," Warren began, citing the Eastern Bloc's collective farms that failed to produce enough food. He answered the question with two questions: "Why don't we use in every other part of our lives? Why don't we think about applying the market?" He cited no educational research.

Lundy said, "We are the only free country that doesn't allow choice in education." She never addressed the question — not surprising from one who sees "no evidence" of evolution. (No, it wasn't I who shouted "beloney" at her.)

Research is important with new products. America doesn't trust new drugs to the marketplace; it requires much testing before a new drug may be sold. West of Milford is a proving grounds where General Motors tests vehicles before marketing them; it's a



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good way to avoid more lawsuits.

Our state Department of Transportation tests many kinds of yellow paint on the highways before it buys one that will be used for lane markers; it doesn't blindly trust the marketplace. Our veterinarian wouldn't perform a ligament operation on the Head Poodle's knee until he had practiced first on cadavers.

Outside the State Board of Education meeting room on the fourth floor of the Hannah Building in Lansing is a rack of research pamphlets. Educators do research on technology in the class-

room, parental involvement, early childhood literacy, high school anthologies, even "integrating education and human services" — a pet idea of Gov. John Engler. Yet the "new majority" proposes to expose kids to charter academies without research and testing.

It so happens there is research on school privatization, which is where the charter school movement is heading. It comes out of Chile and was reported in the September NEA Today, a magazine of the National Education Association. Sure, NEA is a union, but it has done some research; Durant, Lundy and Warren don't even use the word.

The article by Fred J. Soloway says Chile's military government in 1979 with "government decrees turning all public schools over to municipalities and authorizing a new kind of school — the private, subsidized, or 'mixed' school." Anyone could start a mixed school. "It didn't matter if they had the proper infrastructure or hygiene. Each school, be it public or mixed, got money from the government based on

its enrollment."

That's precisely what Durant is advocating: local control, easing of certification rules, the money following the child.

Chile's results: large class sizes, 170,000 dropouts in Santiago, frozen per-pupil allocations (allegedly to encourage collapse of public schools and total privatization), no paid time for classroom preparation, no incentives for teachers to do graduate work, decreasing access of working-class children to higher education.

Give NEA credit: It did its homework and has offered something resembling research. As self-centered as NEA may be, it deserves far more respect than the "new majority" on the State Board of Education, which values unproven, untested and unwashed ideological slogans above experience and fact.

Marketplace forces don't teach kids. Teachers teach kids.

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

## High IQ kids

**M**y husband and I read with great interest the article entitled "Parents choose new school path" Aug. 28.

As the parents of five children, at least one of whom has tested as "gifted," we found very few answers when seeking to place our child in a school to best meet his needs. Interestingly, our oldest son spent three years at one of the parochial schools mentioned in your article, and for two out of the three years he was considered a problem.

Though he was nearly an all-A student, teachers complained that he "didn't follow directions," and "didn't pay attention." Puzzled, we had him tested and were told that he was of "very superior intelligence" and likely bored and under-challenged, a complaint echoed by some of the parents in

the article.

Even with this knowledge, the school did virtually nothing to accommodate his learning needs. Instead, he was treated as a "square peg," and began to internalize feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem.

We have learned that some gifted children are as out of their element intellectually in the "normal" school system as a child of proportionately lower IQ would be in the same situation. And, unfortunately, as we have come to learn, not all private schools can accommodate these children's needs. As a result, these kids suffer immeasurably.

We are writing to advise parents of exceptionally intelligent children to pay close attention to the treatment their child receives in the parochial school. Indeed, switching an intellectually talented child from public to private is not a panacea.

Having more discipline and greater emphasis on academics does not necessarily mean the child's needs are being met. My son suffered for two agonizing years feeling he didn't fit in and was stupid, when in fact he is very bright.

He was considered a problem, as mentioned, because he "danced to a different beat," and, in fact, could not conform with the rigid, uncompromising standards of the school. He came home from school depressed every day, and we could not continue to subject him to such pain. He received counseling to help him deal with his negative feelings about himself, and we were encouraged by the child psychologist to enroll him in a school for gifted children.

As a result, we researched gifted schools, and now he is in attendance at Steppingstone, a private school for gifted children in Farmington Hills. So far, the differences have been dramatic. He

appears happy and interested when he returns from school each day, he feels accepted as he is, and that his opinions matter and are respected. In short, his self-esteem is improving by leaps and bounds.

Although the cost is greater than many area parochial schools, it is well worth the monetary investment to give this child what is due him and all children: a quality education.

During our search for the "right" school, I might add that I spoke to several educators knowledgeable in the area of gifted programs, who feel that the current state of affairs in terms of gifted programs for Farmington school children is sadly lacking.

Programs such as "Delta" were described as insufficient and inadequate for those of higher intelligence/creativity levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our concerns.

Mitch and Kathie Boguslawski  
Farmington Hills

## Lights the way

**W**e wanted to write and express our support for Raymond Dubin's article "Districting Woes Listed" (Community Life, Sept. 14).

By stating the facts, he clearly illustrated the injustices happening to our children. A seven-mile one-way trip to classes with fewer books and increased teacher-student ratios is a far cry from the expectations of young families who recently moved to the area.

Our tax dollars should be supporting the neighborhood schools that our children attend. Raymond Dubin is fighting a fight that we can't afford to lose. Lisa and Dan Sperling, Farmington Hills

## Facts justify fear: Young drivers need experience

**M**y younger son, Nathan, is 13. He's already looking forward to driving a car. And my wife Kathy and I are — well — nervous.

Any parent who has watched a teenager drive off into the gathering dusk has felt the gnawing dread of the late-night phone call that their child has had an accident and is injured or dead.

The fear is justified by the facts.

Nationally, drivers under age 20 make up around 5.5 percent of the driving population, yet they account for 12.6 percent of drivers in fatal crashes and more than 14 percent of drivers in all accidents. Fully 40 percent of 16-year-old drivers have an accident that requires a police report.

The Michigan statistics are similar. Drivers under 20 account for about 6 percent of the state's licenses. But these young drivers account for more than 12 percent of all crashes, 15 percent of crashes involving injuries and 13 percent of all fatality accidents.

How come? Most likely explanation is that young drivers simply lack the experience behind the wheel to deal effectively with difficult driving situations.

After all, under the current Michigan licensing system, a 16-year-old who has completed an approved driver training course — usually 30 hours class time and six hours behind the wheel — can get a full driving license. Getting a learner's permit for a 15-year-old is even easier: 10 hours in the classroom and two hours of driving instruction.

That's not much. "Parents have the mistaken notion that driver's education teaches kids how to drive," said Patricia Waller, director of the University of Michigan Transportation Institute. "All it does is give you the rudimentary training to learn how to drive."

And if state Rep. Dan Gustafson, R-Williamston, has his way, young people will need to have a lot more experience before they are fully licensed to drive. Gustafson is the main sponsor of a bill reported out of the House Transportation Committee last week. It would:

- Lower the age to enroll in driver training from 14 years to 14 years, nine months.
- Require kids while enrolled in driver training to log 60 hours of driving with a parent or legal guardian in the car.
- Allow restricted licenses for 16-year-olds only after passing a state-approved road test. (The



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Michigan road test requirement was eliminated in 1980.)

■ Raise the eligible age for an unrestricted license to 17, but only for those who have had no accidents for the prior six months.

Sounds pretty tough and, at least to my years, pretty good.

It also sounds pretty complicated and hard to keep track of, especially since most of the rules are on the honor system. I couldn't get a lot of police officials to comment on the bill, I suspect because they're reluctant to add a lot of detail when officers pull young people over for an infraction.

Doug Cruce, former state senator from the Birmingham-Troy district and sponsor of the state mandatory seatbelt law, had an interesting perspective for those parents who see driving around with their kids for 60 hours as a burden. "I don't see it as a huge burden. Any parent who says it opens themselves up for an immature driver in the family to get hurt."

Despite its complexity, I hope Rep. Gustafson's bill becomes law.

Nathan won't like it. But Kathy and I do, and it must make those long evenings dreading the late phone call a little easier to bear.

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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