

Reform: Incentive must be in place

Is the real lesson to learn from the recent Detroit teacher strike that Michigan public schools simply cannot be reformed from within?

Some people argue "yes" and go on to add that, therefore, the thing to do is pass the school voucher plan on the theory that you have to destroy public education in order to reform it.

I asked State Treasurer Mark Murray, one of the most thoughtful and experienced public servants in Michigan, about this. Murray should know; he's a member of the appointed school board that picked David Adamany to be interim CEO of the Detroit schools.

"Overall, the strike slows down school reform a little, but it doesn't kill it," said Murray. "It simply shows how tough reforming urban schools really is and how we have to stay on course for years in order to get something meaningful done."

Murray's right. The issue isn't whether public education as a whole can be reformed, but whether urban education in our state can ever be improved. Think about it. The pace of reform in most out-state school districts is fast and getting faster.

Parents, teachers and school boards are now accustomed to looking at how their schools are performing according to standard student assessment tests such as Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests. By bringing market forces to bear on the public K-12 monopoly, charter schools have stimulated the demand for change and accelerated the pace of reform.

Good school districts are now competing — East Lansing and Okemos are good examples — in student performance and in parental satisfaction. And it isn't just a matter of rich districts versus poor ones; neither Frankenmuth nor Ishpeming are particularly rich districts, but their gains in recent years are impressive.

The real issue is what can be done to help/force underperforming urban schools — not only Detroit but also districts such as Inkster, Benton Harbor and Pontiac — to tackle the multiple structure barriers to sustained improvement. For example, it may be that the Inkster school district, which lost some 20 percent of its students to private and charter schools last year, is even worse off than Detroit's.

I suspect that Detroit's problems — past micromeddling school boards, bureaucratic mismanagement, poor/inert labor relations, inadequate supplies, uncoordinated curricula and poor student discipline — apply as well to many other Michigan urban school districts. And, just maybe, the tools for reform now in place in Detroit ought to be applied elsewhere.

Certainly, having an appointed school board



PHILIP POWER

makes a big difference. The evidence is great that in Detroit, at least, there was no real collective bargaining at the table between the schools and the unions; the unions merely went to their patrons on the board and got what they asked for.

Moreover, past school boards came and went; the appointed board in Detroit has a long-term mandate for reform and a clear understanding that change will take years.

Gov. Engler and the state legislature should consider evaluating the extent of failure in other urban districts, appointing receiver boards where the fact of under performance is undoubted and the prospect of reform is as dim as it was in Detroit.

The state law forbidding teacher strikes and providing for individual teachers to be fined in the event of an illegal strike appears to have been a powerful weapon in persuading a majority of the Detroit Federation of Teachers to go back to school. Toughening it further, as some legislators are now urging, seems unnecessary. Unless the state really wants to break all teachers unions, coercing angry (and poorer) teachers back to work is hardly going to assure well-motivated educators in the classroom.

At the end of the day, the key will wind up being merit pay, not given to individual teachers but to the staff of entire buildings that excel.

Adamany couldn't get the Detroit teachers to buy it in collective bargaining, but he wants to experiment with the idea unilaterally.

I hope he will. Until teachers and other school employees — not to mention school boards, administrators and parents — see there really is an incentive in place for student achievement, the prospect for serious school reform in urban districts will be dim.

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LETTERS

Irked with the festival

Being a Farmington native, I like to keep up on the news in my hometown. Regarding the headline Thursday, July 8, "Husband and wife team takes on Farmington Founders Festival," and Sunday, July 12, "Changes irk some crafters," I have a few things to say myself:

I may be living in Kentucky now, but I'm still from Farmington and the crafters weren't the only ones irked by the changes to the Founders Festival. Times change, but not all changes are for the best. In my memory Crafters Corner is synonymous with Farmington and the festival. It's one of the main reasons I come "home" each July.

This year I was very disappointed to discover the arts and crafts usurped by a few children's trivial amusements. Many of my favorite exhibitors were missing, and most of the others had been misplaced. Even the parade lacked that "home town touch." Where were the kids and non-profit groups, the antique cars, etc? It seemed to me that without the Shriners the parade would have been very short and nondescript. What happened to the sense of community? Reassessments and improvements to the festival that encourage participation are always a good thing, but where were the improvements?

The Children's Sale was new, and well organized. I'm sure it was enjoyed by many festival-goers, but where was the focal point of the festival? Were we supposed to walk the entire length of Grand River to view a smattering of crafts in the Downtown Center, at the Methodist Church, then visit the Craftique store's booth? What if I had limited time and especially wanted to see the quality crafts traditionally located at the Masonic Temple? Yes, there were still some exhibits there, but they were crushed together, much smaller than usual and difficult to enjoy with the noise of the generator rumbling all day from the children's rides. The relaxed community fair atmosphere was missing.

Has the almighty dollar become the basis for the festival? Why was the Masonic Temple assessed \$25 per exhibitor? Was the Methodist Church, Craftique and the Center each charged an

exhibitor fee as well? Is money what our founders had in mind when the festival was established, or was it a means of getting together and celebrating the community? It concerned me to hear the statement regarding the Masonic Temple having their own separate show. I thought the artists and crafters were all part of the festival, regardless to whom the property belongs. Does the new Founders Festival, Inc. have the power to determine who is part of the festival? Again, is it the money?

If it is the money maybe someone should remind the organizers who is spending their money in Farmington during the festival. Each of these artists and crafters pay for lodging, meals, shopping, etc. during the event downtown. What happens when they all decide to take their business elsewhere? Will the kiddie amusements make up the difference? Did the organizers forget that people from all over southern Michigan travel to, stay and shop in Farmington during the festival partly because of the high quality of arts and crafts present each year? Where will their dollars be spent next year?

Oh, I realize Watts, Inc. has the ability to make money. I've read the article about Watts, I recognize their management skills as promoters for the entertainment business. Concerts held in one building or place is becoming tradition of sorts. Watts in his own words said "we kind of invented how to do major concerts." What does that have to do with a community festival? They might as well compare apples and oranges. They should have looked around the family community of Farmington and recognized that we too have traditions; ones worth keeping!

The community of Farmington has shared in the rich history of family and traditions as part of what makes living here so great. Thirty-four annual Farmington Area Founders Festivals are part of that shared history. It would be a shame to see the 35th festival lose some of it! Will I be able to share these traditions with my children, or will I only be able to share the memory of what was?

Louise Hozeska
Burlington, Kentucky

A Vision of Community for Older Adults

Steven Paine, Botsford Health Care Continuum

Society holds an expectation that the health care industry will not only treat disease and injury but also seek solutions when the quality of life is challenged. Botsford Health Care Continuum believes part of that challenge has been to develop new choices that maximize quality and independence for older adults. Botsford has invested research and resources to find a lifestyle alternative that acknowledges the value of aging and supports the independence we all cherish. This research ultimately led to Botsford Commons as a full service continuum devoted to the needs of an aging population. However, it is a continuum with a twist.

The usual model for a continuum of care is a cycle which requires one to move to different living areas as one's physical condition changes. Each move results in losses of freedom, familiar surroundings and friendly faces. Botsford sought to identify ways to make the home supportive of the changing needs of the individual, not the other way around. Each residence on the campus was designed to quietly support the individual by providing an environment that compensates for some of the losses that come naturally with aging. The Commons also provides professional support services geared to helping each resident achieve and maintain an optimum level of health and independence. At its heart is a support network which ensures that individuals do not have to face problems alone.

Despite our advances, sometimes people still need help with the challenges of daily living. The Botsford Commons continuum includes a 64-unit Assisted Living Center offering services to support any need that a resident may have without intruding on one's sense of independence and privacy. The Center effectively incorporates the research which went into other campus elements including the emphasis on building a vision of community.

The spirit of community is reflected in the care that is given. It is evident in the interactions among residents as they watch out for one another. It is evident in campus facilities which allow residents to meet for meals, swim in the pool, enjoy the home theater, or the library, billiard or craft room. It is evident in the ability to stay in the home that you have selected while services are delivered to you instead of you going to them. And it is most evident in the ability to meet any medical crisis by providing the level of care required at a given time and return home when the time is right.

Celebrating Assisted Living Week 1999

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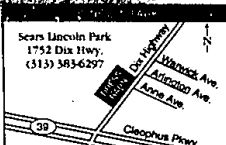
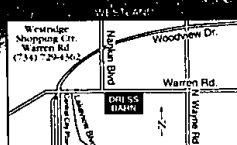
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