

# Control of schools challenged

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

## Supt. Runkel calls for changes in curriculum, accreditation

Michigan students can look forward to a more rigorous curriculum — particularly in foreign languages — if state school superintendent Philip E. Runkel's proposals are adopted by State Board of Education, local school districts, colleges and the legislature.

And in a major departure from Michigan's tradition of unchallenged local autonomy, the state board would accredit local school districts.

"Each local district should continue to have jurisdiction over its total curriculum," the report said, "but it seems clear now that the time has come to require by state law certain standards."

The eight-member state board was scheduled to vote on the package Wednesday. But board members' comments at a news conference indicated it would pass easily.

IF LOCAL boards fail to adopt the "recommendations" by 1988, the state board will ask the governor and legislature to require them by law.

"Few states allow as much local control as Michigan," said board member Norman O. Stockmeyer Sr. of Westland as Runkel unveiled a book of 15 recommendations late Tuesday. "This program isn't to give us more work or more power."

"Local autonomy is not an end in itself; it is not a sacred cow," said member John Watanen Jr., a Michigan Technological University professor from Marquette.

"Michigan is one of 15 states out of 50 with no central agency accrediting schools," said member Annette Miller of Huntington Woods. Although the accrediting plan was last in a 25-page list of recommendations, she considered it the most important.

"The fundamental issue is the needs of students, not who has turf or power,"



Philip E. Runkel  
a "globalist"

said Runkel, the only superintendent of public instruction in 90 years who has headed major school districts (Grand Rapids and Utica) before reaching the No. 1 state post.

MANY MAJOR recommendations of the two-year plan had been leaked to the press days before this week's board meeting. Recommendations for more emphasis on communications skills, science, math, "hands-on" computer studies, 10 more days per year of classroom work and teacher improvement were well known.

But the released text revealed a heavy emphasis on foreign languages at all levels of schools — elementary, high school and college.

"It's shameful that so many Americans are mono-lingual," said Watanen, the Michigan Tech professor. "How many American businessmen can speak Japanese? How many Japanese businessmen can speak English? How many Americans in the Tehran embassy (seized by Iranians in 1979) could speak Parsi? Many nations are bilingual by statute."

"If I were a student in business administration or engineering, I would seek to be bilingual," added board member Edmund Vandette, a Northern Michigan University professor from Houghton.

"It's necessary for peace in the world," said Miller.

An assistant to Runkel noted the state superintendent is a "globalist" who has traveled throughout China and Europe and was once superintendent of the American school in Athens, Greece.

LOCAL SCHOOL boards were asked to:

- "Develop foreign languages at the elementary level, based on communications, understanding and foreign language proficiency."

- Encourage college-bound high school students to take "at least two years of a foreign language."

The only academic recommendation made to the state's 13 public colleges and 29 community colleges was in the area of foreign languages. Colleges were advised to "require two years of foreign language instruction or demonstrated proficiency for admission or graduation. Students should be allowed to meet this requirement at either the high school or college level."

IN SUMMARY, the state board proposed:

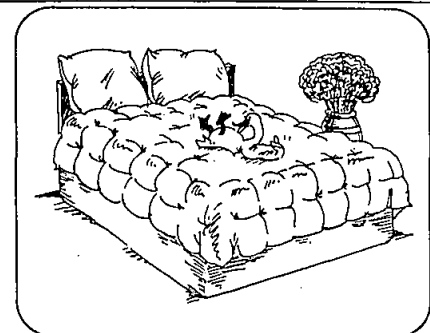
- To improve learning through such steps as strengthening graduation requirements, strengthening preparation for going to college, establishing

written student performance standards, and lengthening the school day and school year.

- "To create a better learning environment, a comprehensive school-planning process to address issues of homework, discipline, attendance and dropouts; and funding special programs for gifted and talented and preschool."

- "To strengthen the profession, increased emphasis on professional development, certification and salaries."

- To deliver educational services,



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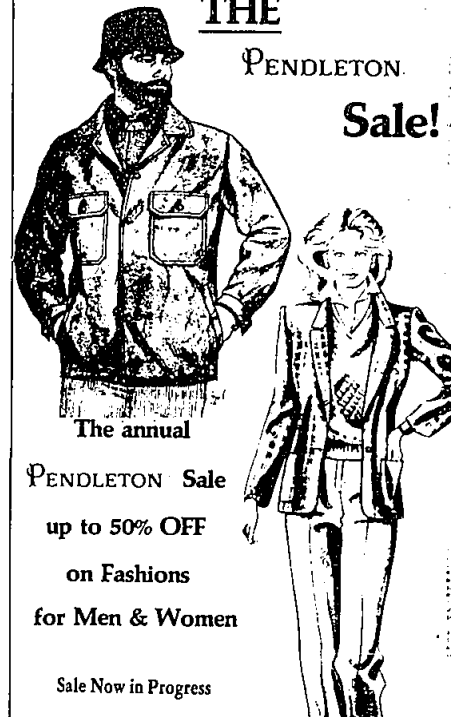
"educational structures where school districts join together to provide unique programs."

"Time is important in beginning to make these changes. The turn of the century seems distant, but children born in 1984 could be graduating from high school in the year 2000."

"The time is now, then, to adopt programs and improvements which will prepare Michigan's young people and adults for both today's challenges and those of the new century. This is the aim."

"If the plan's goals are reached, Michigan citizens of the year 2000 can look back on 1984 not as the mind-boggling time portrayed in the novel '1984' but as a time when Michigan took another step forward to nurture the education of all its citizens."

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