

POINTS OF VIEW

There is a way to change education environment

Some things never seem to change. Thirty years ago teachers in Detroit and environs were picketing for decent wages and working conditions.

As track coach at Southeastern High during that era, I walked inner-city neighborhoods after school with colleagues and some of my team to turn out a supportive millage vote.

Twenty years ago, after I led a campaign which upgraded Berkley's abysmal athletic programs to exemplary status, my programs and my job as district athletic director were placed on the chopping block, dependent on whether a millage might pass.

Ten years ago, teachers in Plymouth Canton were stopping cars of administrators who tried to pass a picket line, and they also petitioned to keep me in my secondary executive director job endangered by budget cuts.

Two years ago, as assistant superintendent in Rochester, I initiated pay-for-play sports, curtailed other programs, raised class sizes and retired early to save the threatened job of my less senior staff.

This year, local school districts struck again, and the president of the Detroit teachers' union exchanged bitter barbs with the superintendent.

Teachers and administrators must unite to stop this madness, and taxpayers and legislators who care about children must help. Insufficient and inequitable school funding throughout the state is pitting good people against each other to fight over the scraps — suburb versus city versus rural area, teacher versus administrator versus taxpayer — when instead we all should be allies in the common cause of refurbishing Michigan's future for all children.



JOHN TELFORD

Getting our society out of its present mess is going to require the fully tapped potential of them all. Of course, this will cost money. Financially strapped administrations cite research which they say substantiates the truism that class sizes don't affect the quality of instruction, but common sense tells us that teachers can individualize instruction much more easily with smaller classes. The class size

problem in Michigan's largest district is particularly monstrous due to the dire social conditions there.

It's hard to blame Detroit for singling out a few schools for empowerment and choice — euphemisms for a concept which can be more frankly expressed like this: "We don't have anywhere near enough money to upgrade every school, so we're going to try to improve just a few of them and let the rest drift down the drain." Schools of choice aren't the answer. Making all schools into choice schools is the only answer.

A Detroit union coalition advocates leaving schools open for longer hours and remodeling them into centers which would house some health, recreation and other community services. It recommends instituting volunteer tutorial programs, adapting adult education curricula to industrial needs and providing on-site care for children of

adult students and school employees. If Detroit could pull this rabbit out of a hat for all of its schools, they'd be truly empowered.

For years, I've been propounding that plan, and it's applicable to other districts, too. But again, all of us will need to roll up our sleeves and support it. Meanwhile, we need to find a fuller and more equitable way to finance public education than the property tax gimmick. Then good people won't always have to picket and strike and strive to pass paltry millages in desperate efforts to refurbish Michigan's — and America's — tarnished and cloudy future. We will already have ensured that it will shine.

John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton district.

Empowerment concept carries some limitations

QUESTION: A major issue in the Detroit teachers' strike seems to be the empowerment issue, a concept in which teachers and parents make building level decisions. What's the problem with the concept?

ANSWER: As a former assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction for years, I believe that empowering teachers, parents and building administrators in the decision making process is the way to go. It worked for me.

However, this is not a perfect world and there exist limitations which all parties need to clearly understand or the concept will fade away. Issues such as:

- In Detroit, a computerized school supply system appears to require teachers to commit considerably more "clerical time" than their contract calls for.
- Experienced teachers and administrators know that empowerment is not new. Many "ancestors" have pre-

ceded the "new" empowerment concept. Zero Based budgeting in the '60(s) gave X dollars to school building for principal and staff to decide its use. We have had Site Based Management in the '70(s). Participatory Management (somewhere along the way). For the '80's times, we had the Mager's Behavioral Objective system that involved all parties with stated outcomes for all school issues. Don't forget Dr. Glasser who gave us the Quality Circle which some administrations adopted to school management. And Dr. Wendell Houph of Wayne State University has been implementing CIPS, the Collaborative School Improvement Process for 20 years, with positive feedback.

Limitations

Why empowerment management plans come and go is often because teachers, administrators and parents are not clearly sensitized to the limitations. For instance:



DOC DOYLE

Empowerment plans can delegate some authority in the decision-making process but cannot delegate away the responsibility.

- If parents and teachers are made to believe they will be making decisions outside of the realm of their responsibility, they are being deceived. The building principal is the one who

will be called on the carpet if an empowerment committee in his/her building is dominated by some off the wall parent group. And teachers will go back to their room and tend to their first priority — the children.

• A teacher/school building empowerment committee will always prioritize its basic needs first. This will precede esoteric ventures into curriculum.

• Dictatorial principals will smile and go along with an empowerment plan (at central office meetings) while still managing the building in the same, single-minded mode that has been successful for them. And, frankly, some teachers prefer this management style.

• When empowerment hits a building, the 20 percent risk-taking type teachers in the building will eagerly jump in with both feet ready to go. The "I'll-watch-and-see-if-it-falls" teachers (about 70 percent) will join in if the plan becomes successful. That leaves those 10 percent of teachers who hate

administrators and know anything from the central office is a communist plot.

• The democratic, child and teacher-oriented principal won't even know something new is going on because it is the way he/she has always operated.

Therefore, empowerment plans can delegate some authority in the decision-making process but cannot delegate away the responsibility.

Indeed, the electorato will not only hold the principal and the superintendent responsible but eventually the board of education if "things get wild".

You see, the more teachers are involved in curriculum decision-making the more they have at stake to make the curriculum successful. The less involved, the less interest in the outcome. But beyond curriculum empowerment, there is a fine line.

James "Doc" Doyle, a former teacher/school administrator/university instructor, is president of Doyle and Associates, an educational consulting firm.

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