



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
LANSING



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SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

TO: Members of the State Board of Education

FROM Tom Watkins, Superintendent

DATE: November 1, 2004

**SUBJ: MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
HIGH SCHOOL REFORM TEAM**

Since October, 2003, a group of local educators and department staff have been meeting regularly to discuss the urgency of the reform of high school education in Michigan. They have attended conferences on high school reform sponsored by the U. S. Department of Education and the International Center for Leadership in Education. They recently met with a referent group of educators from K-12 and higher education, as well as business leaders, to discuss their tentative findings and recommendations.

At my request, they have formulated their tentative recommendations in a "white paper" document for presentation to the Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth. The deadline for submission of recommendations to the Commission predated the State Board of Education meeting and were therefore presented as draft recommendations, pending your ability to review them.

The High School Reform Team's draft recommendations are attached and will be discussed at our November 9 meeting.

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# **Michigan Department of Education HIGH SCHOOL REFORM TEAM**

## **Report to the Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth**

### **INTRODUCTION – THE “WHY” OF REFORM**

Michigan's economic future, in particular its competitiveness in a global knowledge economy, is dependent upon a highly skilled and talented workforce. Obviously, preparation for this workforce takes place in key arenas, particularly in colleges, trade schools, and universities, but it also takes place in a key arena beforehand -- in Michigan's schools. At the secondary end of the K-12 experience, students begin exploring careers, focusing their studies around particular academic disciplines, career clusters, and even technical education opportunities, so that appropriate exploration of their own interests, aptitudes, and abilities takes place. Students also strive to build the highest competencies in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies – academic building blocks upon which higher-level thinking skills are honed and crafted. Yet, are our students on target? Are our educators? Is the Michigan high school experience, as currently designed and delivered, most effectively meeting the needs of today's students – tomorrow's knowledge-economy competitors – as customers, clients, and as products of our changing economy?

With all due respect to the hard working, caring, and talented educators working in Michigan high schools, REFORM is needed, and it is needed with a sense of urgency. Our schools are operating on agrarian calendars, designed many years ago, compartmentalized in a manufacturing-era model that lends itself to isolation of both people and content, rather than the interdependency and interconnectedness needed for success in the workforce today. Dangerously large gaps in proficiency exist between urban minority students and their more affluent counterparts (ACT Report, MDE 2004). In a world in which “work can be taken to worker,” – with the outsourcing of jobs overseas and the competitive labor markets in foreign countries – we cannot afford to leave any children behind. More than an ethical and moral issue; it is absolutely an “economic issue” that cannot be denied or minimized (Intl. Center for Leadership in Education 2004).

Most striking is that the current high school experience is not reaching out and meeting the needs of our students, inspiring in them the desire to work hard, succeed, and refine their skills to ready themselves for future challenges. Monitoring the Future – A Continuing Study of American Youth, surveyed 10<sup>th</sup> grade students nationally in 2003, with the following compelling findings:

- 23.1% skipped a class, 1 – 3 times, in the last 4 weeks.
- 44.1 % failed to complete or turn in assignments.
- 44.2% never or seldom found schoolwork hard to understand.
- 71.4% sometimes, often, or almost always hated being in school in the past year.
- 80.4% say that their teachers interrupt classes to deal with misbehavior or goofing off, one to twenty times per week.

Colleges and universities are concerned also that the academic preparation of entering freshmen is necessitating an increase in remedial course offerings. The costs of remediation and retraining students leaving high school for the workforce is also staggering (Greene, 2000).

### MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S RESPONSE

The Michigan Department of Education's High School Reform Team has been working for over a year studying student achievement, as well as state and national data on the need for high school reform. Traveling to Washington D.C. and St. Louis, Missouri for meetings with United States Department of Education officials, Michigan's Team has charted a roadmap for reform in Michigan, which aligns with the USDOE'S *Preparing America's Future* initiative. Team members have worked diligently to study current research and to ready themselves, as per the directive of State Superintendent Tom Watkins, to provide information to the Lt. Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth. Most recently, the team convened a Referent Group to examine researched, promising practices of high school reform, both in Michigan and from across the country. The High School Reform Team's recommendations, based on its work to date, are offered below for consideration and review.

### PROMISING PRACTICES OF HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

Four general areas of reform have been uncovered as all-important in our research. We will refer to them as the "4 R's" –

1. **RIGOR** in the high school experience;
2. **RELEVANCE** of high school academic study – with respect to students and with respect to the economically competitive world in which they live;
3. **RELATIONSHIPS** necessary to foster academic success;
4. **RETHINKING** of the structures and functions of high school as currently designed.

## DETAILED REVIEW OF PROMISING PRACTICES

With respect to RIGOR, our High School Reform Team recommends that:

- a. Michigan revise and increase the rigor of Michigan's High School Curriculum Standards, including standards and/or course expectations for core courses required for graduation. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
  - Legislate high school graduation requirements and develop common course expectations/standards for all high school core courses required for graduation (National Governor's Association).
  - Enhance horizontal alignment across academic departments in different schools -- especially regarding high expectations for math and English language arts.
  - Develop a strong research-based literacy component in the curriculum for all students (Daggett, 2004; MCREL, 2000).
  - Develop a Senior Project and/or a Senior Mastery Process as part of the curriculum, which includes: learning about careers, developing a portfolio, and/or completing 75 hours of fieldwork in a career area of interest (*High Schools that Work*; Henry Ford Academy, Dearborn).
  - Revise and increase rigor of Michigan's high school curriculum standards (Achieve, Inc.).
  
- b. Michigan develop an assessment system, including interim classroom assessments, tied to rigorous high school standards, including end-of-course examinations for core subjects. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
  - Teach teachers how to use interim or common assessments to guide instruction (Stiggins & LaFee, 2002).
  - Ensure a laser-like focus on data at the classroom level to make daily instructional decisions (Daggett, 2004).
  - Administer common end-of-course exams (U.S. Dept. of Educ., 2003).  
Integrate individualized educational plans and appropriate individualized assessment into classrooms (Gened/CTE/ALL).
  - Ensure regular assessment of students' academic progress, charting their academic growth, identifying students in need of extra help, ensuring that students are given the additional instructional time they need (MCREL, 2000; McCall et.al., 2004).

- c. Michigan provide support for students who need assistance to be successful in a rigorous course of study. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
- Ensure that students whose skills are in the lowest quartile are in academically rigorous, not low-level, courses (U.S. Dept. of Educ., 2003).
  - Build on an understanding that the most successful students combine academic with practical or vocational coursework, as compared to those who only do one or the other (NAVE Report, 2004).
  - Accelerate rather than remediate, ensuring that students having basic skill deficiencies are able to remain in core courses while attending “double dip” or “double dose” reading or math courses, or credit recovery programs (U of Kansas, 1997-2004; CRESPAR, Johns Hopkins University).
  - Ensure that school counselors are adequately prepared to assist minority students with course selections in order to promote high expectations and positive scheduling decisions (MCREL, 2000).

**With respect to RELEVANCE, our High School Reform Team recommends that:**

- a. Michigan integrate experiences that are individually meaningful to each student within all curriculum and instruction. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
- Create a mechanism for career/technical education to articulate with liberal arts education, such as through career academies, work-based learning experiences, and authentic community based projects (Tucker, “System is the Problem”; CRESPAR, Johns Hopkins University).  
Promote teaching methodologies that incorporate the “Rigor & Relevance Framework” (Daggett, 2004).
  - Implement a focus on learning how to learn (metacognition) utilizing a consistent theoretical basis (SIM: Feverstein; Kent Intermediate School District).
  - Increase access to intellectually challenging career/technical studies, with a major emphasis on using high-level mathematics, science, language arts, and problem-solving skills in the modern workplace and in preparation for continued learning (*High Schools that Work*).
- b. Michigan provide more effective professional development of educators to increase student achievement. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:

- Establish professional development opportunities that will foster a comprehensive commitment to literacy/strong reading skills for each and every high school student (U.S. Dept. of Educ., 2003).
  - Engage school leaders in substantive professional development regarding the analysis and use of disaggregated student data for school planning (Price, *Education Week*, 2004).  
Engage teachers in the use of classroom-based, data-driven curriculum and instruction (U.S. Dept of Educ., 2004).
  - Offer incentives to teachers to use professional development to improve instruction (MacIver, Fanz, 2000).
- c. Michigan redesign pre-service teacher training to align with best practices and K-12 outcomes. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
- Examine prerequisites and timing of practical experience in teacher preparation and ensure that highly qualified staff enter teaching with knowledge and experience, including an internship year (Michigan State University).
  - Facilitate teacher candidate recruitment and providing tuition support for those who agree to teach in high-need areas (Michigan State University).
  - Continue to investigate and implement alternative routes for teacher certification so that competent professionals in business and industry are better able to become certified teachers.
  - Examine the validity of teacher exams and provide more meaningful measures of authentic assessment for pre-service teaching candidates.
  - Compel the establishment of K-12 and higher education collaboration to ensure that teachers are trained/certified to the standards that competent teachers must meet, and certified to deliver the content standards that students are expected to learn (U.S. Dept. of Educ.).

With respect to **RELATIONSHIPS**, our High School Reform Team recommends that:

- a. Michigan design schools, or portions of schools, as small learning communities. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
- Develop and implement small career academies with employer partnerships in existing high schools (MDRC HS reform).
  - Organize larger high schools into smaller learning communities: academies, teams, houses, etc., to support the building of relationships (Cotton 2004; Stern and Wing, 2004; Johns Hopkins; NASSP, *Breaking Ranks II*, 2004).  
Ensure that educators understand and adopt principles of professional learning communities in schools and classrooms (*Schools that Learn*).

- Assign the most experienced teachers to less able students, and ensure that the smallest class sizes are given to the most challenged students (Haycock, Education Trust; MCREL, 2000).
- b. Michigan create an environment responsive to the educational needs of members in the learning community. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
- Implement dropout prevention and intervention programs, and provide support and autonomy for schools that serve the most at-risk, challenged students (Donlan, “Lost Souls” MDE State Board Presentation, 2004).
  - Place more at-risk students in college-bound courses with extra supports (MCREL, 2000).
  - Bring existing healthcare, counseling and other social services to local high school campuses (MCREL, 2000).
  - Create opportunities for better student-adult relationships and give students a voice in how schools function (*Thinking Out Loud, Schools We Need*).
  - Change the school culture to be more inclusive of disenfranchised groups (Blair; Rolon; Tatum).
- c. Michigan unify involvement of home, school, and community cultures in support of student success and safety. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
- Encourage the expansion of effective conflict resolution and consensus building models to enhance school safety and order (Chadwick & Associates).
  - Implement “empowering discipline” approaches to build student resiliency and to foster students’ interpersonal development (Phillips, 2000; Feuerstein; Payne; Williams, MI Behavioral Learning Support).
  - Partner with communities and businesses in practical and mutually beneficial ways to make a difference and to offer another “lens” through which kids view their future opportunities (Carnegie Corp.).
  - Find ways to engage more students and their families in school/home partnerships and greater ownership of their learning.
  - Examine all words and systems to maintain/build high levels of dignity/self worth within all student populations (Tim Lucas, *Schools That Learn*).

**With respect to RETHINKING, our High School Reform Team recommends that:**

- a. Michigan integrate high school outcomes to college entrance requirements in order to enhance post-secondary educational success. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
  - Align high school graduation requirements with college entrance requirements (including high school exit exams with post-secondary entrance tests).
  - Increase dual enrollment options between high schools and post-secondary institutions; making sure time/credits count toward post-secondary education.
  - Establish a K-16 environment and create an atmosphere of opportunity and expectation (Irving Buchen, "Education in America: The Next 25 Years" *The Futurist*, Jan-Feb, 2003).
  - Re-invent the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade years, compressing learning opportunities (Daggett, 2004).
  - Develop college/post-secondary educational development and preparation plans for all grade 9 students (Joftus).
  
- b. Michigan embrace research that supports the transition to more flexible educational models. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
  - Transition to a competency based system and away from the Carnegie method of granting credit (Raise the bar: Gismondi/NASBER; "Teacher Job Satisfaction in a Year Round School," E. Eisner).
  - Restructure the senior year experience to provide a capstone experience. Internships, service learning, research activity are examples of capstone experiences. (National commission on the senior year, 2000-2001, Governor Patton, KY, Chairperson)
  - Employ creative scheduling models and delivery systems to give at-risk students additional quality instructional time needed (Chas. A. Dana Center 1999; MCREL 2000).  
Reorganize the school calendar and/or school year to allow more flexibility in teaching and learning (Prakash Nair).
  
- c. Michigan align standards and resources to accommodate best practices. Michigan could accomplish this by doing the following:
  - Provide waivers to Michigan high schools that wish to pilot reform initiatives and/or field-test new and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
  - Address any legislative, departmental, and/or fiscal barriers that exist for schools that wish to promote learning flexibly, so that they can best provide reform-minded programs for students.

- Differentiate levels of the merit award program to award financial rewards to students who pass some, yet not all, areas of the MEAP.
- Align pupil accounting rules, as well as all other governmental structures/requirements, with reform efforts.

### **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

As the Lt. Governor's Commission readies its final report and charts a course for Michigan to travel, the Michigan Department of Education's High School Reform Team will continue its work on REFORM, under the leadership of State Superintendent Tom Watkins and Chief Academic Officer Dr. Jeremy Hughes. Further work is necessary, if lasting reform is to be fostered and ensured for all -- students, educators, and stakeholders -- in Michigan's high schools.

Please note that if the Lt. Governor's Commission desires further work be accomplished on its behalf by the MDE High School Reform Team, rest assured that Team members will work in any capacity to promote a better and more successful Michigan -- for our children, our future adults, and for a sound economic future for all.

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11/3/2004

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