

# Appendix I:

## Public Education in Michigan: The Public Good

Thomas J. Haas, Chair

The importance of education has long been recognized in Michigan, including before Michigan was granted state status. The Northwest Ordinance passed in 1787 by congress, created a compact between the original states and the Northwest Territory, which included Michigan, in which “schools and the means of educational shall forever be encouraged.”<sup>156</sup> When Michigan adopted its first constitution in 1835, two years before it achieved statehood, using slightly different language but the same concept, Michigan encouraged education and intellectual and scientific pursuits in its constitution, even requiring funding for the promoted pursuits not only at the K–12 level but also for universities.<sup>157</sup>

Although the funding mechanisms have since changed, the Michigan Constitution has provided that education and schools shall be promoted in every iteration of the constitution and continues to do so today. Mirroring language from the Northwest Ordinance, in 1908 and in the current constitution, the people included the mandate that “[r]eligion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”<sup>158</sup> And like Michigan’s first constitution, Michigan chose to not only express such encouragement but also to fund K–12 (which is provided at no cost) and maintain universities in the current constitution.

Indeed, this concept was so important that the delegates of the Constitutional Convention of 1961–1962 considered the language found in Article VIII, § 1 as the first substantive proposal before the convention. A delegate from the education committee linked the language back to the Northwest Ordinance and asked that the language be adopted in as well, “not only because of the historic significance of the language but because of the importance...of the development of education in our state of Michigan.” Another delegate expounding upon the history of this provision stated:

It is therefore within this historic tradition that we consider this section today. It is within the realization that our basic liberties and our very foundations are rooted in an educated society as was foretold by our forefathers hundreds of years ago. It is fitting and proper that the purpose of education be the first item submitted for your consideration. There is no doubt that it has been one of the first items of government since we have known that institution on these soils. For us, the people of Michigan, the [Northwest Ordinance] was our first and most basic constitution. And its proper concern with religious freedom, the bills of rights and education is a living testimony to the wisdom of its writers.

As shown not only in the constitution's plain language but also in the testimony surrounding its adoption in the most recent Constitutional Convention, the importance of education has been recognized as fundamental and vital to Michigan and its citizenry since its inception.

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