

The Green Sheet

March 2007

Dearborn, MI

General Membership

Future meeting dates

March	20	Edsel Ford
April	24	McCullough-Unis
May	22	O.L. Smith

Meetings begin at 4 PM.

June 6 is the annual end of the year party at Park Place beginning at 3 pm.

NCLB Commission Report

The Commission on No Child Left Behind, a 15 member bipartisan group led by former Governor Roy E. Barnes of Georgia and Tommy Thompson, the former secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, and financed by private foundations released a report meant to be a blueprint for Congress as it prepares to consider renewal of the law later this year. The report calls for judging teachers and principals by their students test scores and to block chronically ineffective educators from working in high poverty schools. The commission also proposed that states revamp their testing system to track individual student progress from year to year, and to give schools credit if they are within sight of achievement targets, rather than only if they reach them.

Edward McElroy, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said that there were no reliable assessment systems to tie student achievement to teacher performance. Currently, the law calls for teachers to be “highly qualified” in the subject they teach. “The highly qualified measure was only just introduced. To add another hoop at this point in time just demoralizes people. It’s the opposite of what you would want to do if you want the system to work.”

The report also calls for standardization in the way states report student achievement. Currently, each state can choose the minimum number of students who must be present to report test results by ethnic and other groups. Some states set the bar so low that they in effect create a loophole that allows them to sidestep the law. Texas requires 200 students while Maryland requires 5. The commission recommended that states adopt a national standard of achievement linked to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. (NAEP)

The report compared how in many states students considered proficient in reading on the state test were not proficient in reading on the national test. In Mississippi, 87 percent of 4th graders were considered proficient in reading by results on the state test. The national test, however, showed that only 18 percent were.

Teacher Faces Jail Over Pornography on a Class Computer

Julie Amero, a substitute teacher at a middle school in Norwich, Connecticut, simply wanted to e-mail her husband. Authorities contend that she was exposing 11 and 12 year old students to pornography, rather than teaching them English. Last month, Ms. Amero was convicted of four counts of risking injury to a child and faces up to 40 years in prison at a sentencing hearing in late March. She refused a plea bargain that would have set her free and maintains her innocence.

Ms. Amero contends that when she arrived on that day on October of 2004, she asked the regular seventh grade language arts teacher if she could use his computer to email her husband, but first went to the bathroom. When she returned, the teacher was gone but the students were gathered around the screen, watching a hairstyle website. When she tried to close the site she got an endless barrage of pop up ads for pornography sites. The images continued all day long and Ms. Amero contends that she has “no clue about computers.”

Ms. Amero plans to appeal and lawyers have offered to handle the appeal for free.

Several computer experts that have followed the case say that spyware or malware could have hijacked the machine’s browser so that it visited pornography sites without prompting and created the computer logs that helped convict Ms. Amero.

During the trial, Robert Hartz, the information services manager for Norwich’s schools, said the computer’s filters that would have blocked such ads were not fully operational, since they lacked the proper updated infor-

mation for several weeks. School superintendent, Pam Aubin said that Mr. Hartz had ordered an upgrade but the supplier sent it to the wrong email address.

Asked why she did not simply pull the plug during the ensuing six hours, Ms. Amero said, “I was taught never to touch anything in the teacher’s classroom.”

The trial transcript makes clear that neither Mr. Hartz, the schools’ technology expert, nor a Norwich detective who examined the computer, looked for the presence of spyware or malware.

Utah Approves Voucher Plan

A voucher plan allotting up to \$3000.00 for any public school student to put toward private school tuition has been approved in Utah. Voucher plans are generally intended for poor families or students attending schools that have poor academic records. There will be no such restriction in this plan. Utah currently has the largest class sizes in the country and until now has spent less per student than any other state.

The vouchers will be open to all of the state’s 512,000 public school students. The amount will depend on family income and would be limited to students already in public schools.

The plan which would go into effect this fall is expected to cost \$9.3 million in its first year and \$327 million over 12 years. Utah has a \$1.6 billion budget surplus. Utah schools are funded with an income tax.

NAEP

National Assessment of Educational Progress

According to the New York Times, American 12th graders are performing worse in reading than 12th graders did in 1992, when a comparable exam was given. The new scores, based on tests given in 2005, show that only about 35% of 12th graders are proficient in reading and 23% are proficient in math.

Dependent Coverage

New Michigan law requires that health care coverage for dependent children who are full-time or part-time students must be continued if the student takes a leave of absence from school due to illness or injury. The coverage would continue for 12 months from the last day of attendance in school or until the student reaches the age when the coverage would otherwise end. The law is expected to affect mainly college students. Insurance companies would be prohibited from raising the premium during the period. Under the new law, the student's physician will have to certify in writing that it is medically necessary for the student to take a leave of absence. The bill, originally introduced in March 2006, passed in the House of Representatives in June and in the Senate on Dec. 12. It was approved by Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Dec. 28.

New DFT Members

According to President Harris, the dft has gained 82 new members for the 2006—2007 school year. There may be a slight layoff this year due to the closing of Clara B. Ford and fewer applicants of shared time positions.

Private Contracting

Michigan school districts are saving money through private contracting and using the money to mitigate the damage of higher costs for health insurance, retirement and utilities. In interviews with Michigan Education Report, representatives in school districts that have contracted with private companies in the past year for janitorial, transportation or food services said their budget outlook still is not good, but that it would have been worse without outsourcing.

About a third of all Michigan school districts hire private firms through competitive contracting for janitorial, transportation or food services.

Highly Qualified Staff

Most Michigan school districts will have "highly qualified" teachers in place in time to meet a June 2007 deadline, state officials say. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires 100 percent of teachers to teach in their field of expertise in the core academic areas of elementary education, special education, math, science, English, foreign languages, art, social studies, economics, political science, geography and history. Flora Jenkins, director of the Office of Professional Preparation for the Michigan Department of Education, said the department expects the June deadline to be met.

Grievances

According to VP David Atkins, the grievance regarding Weingarten rights has been settled. The reference to discipline has been removed from the member's file and replaced with a letter of directives.