

High School Could Be...Better. But How?

American Institution Proves Difficult To Change

By Teresa Méndez

The Christian Science Monitor
PORTLAND, MAINE - The American high school is one of the country's most iconic institutions. It's also proven to be one of the most difficult to change.

Earlier this month, Gov. John Baldacci of Maine sat before dozens of students and listened as they spoke about their high school experiences.

The dialogue was one in a series of student town hall meetings convened around the country by the National Governors Association over the past year, and part of a broader discussion that has come to include everyone from educators and business leaders to President Bush.

Students continue to drop out of high school at an alarming rate - in some groups, as few as half of students graduate. Those who are graduated too often are unprepared for college or work. Recent studies have found that many high-schoolers feel unchallenged and unengaged. This, and the shift from an industrial to a global, knowledge-based economy, has made rethinking high school a priority for many.

As with much of education reform, "the bursts of interest come and go," says Theodore Sizer, an education professor and author of the 1984 book "Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High

School." In the late 1950s, the fear of falling behind the Soviets led to a push to improve math and science instruction. The trend in the '60s was to consolidate small high schools into larger structures to support more diverse courses. The '80s saw yet another wave of reform.

But the focus always seems to return to younger children. And by many measures, years of elementary school reform efforts are beginning to pay off.

To some degree, high school has been thought unfixable, its institutional culture too entrenched. "The story of the American high school is extremely powerful," says Paul Schwarz, principal in residence at the US Department of Education under President Clinton. During his tenure, Mr. Schwarz pointed out that while money was being poured into elementary and middle schools, high schools were largely ignored. He was told that tackling high school was too big a task. But he's encouraged by the newfound willingness today.

Among the raft of reform efforts under way:

Challenging curricula. In an attempt to undo tracking, many districts and states are implementing college-preparatory curricula for all their students. The Los Angeles Unified School District recently decided to make college-prep standard, and similar moves are afoot in Oklahoma, Indiana, Mississippi, and Delaware. But critics wonder if imposing a one-size-fits-all

approach is the best solution.

Small schools. The idea of splintering large high schools into smaller learning communities has been evolving since the 1970s. However, it remained a fringe effort until it was championed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; its grants have been awarded to more than 1,500 schools in 42 states.

Early college. Some schools, like Bard High School Early College in New York, enable students to be graduated with both a high school diploma and an associate of arts degree. In 2002, 57 percent of colleges and universities enrolled high school students, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. College-level courses, like Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, are also becoming more popular; 1.1 million students took AP exams last year.

Eliminating grade levels. Rather than having students earn credits to advance to the next grade level, under this system there would be no 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grades. Mastery of a subject would determine whether a student moved on to the next level. And students would retake only classes they failed, rather than repeat a grade. Boston Public Schools have explored this system.

Some see reinventing high school as a high-stakes test for the entire public school system. "There is a sense of urgency now," says Constanca Warren, director of urban high school initiatives at the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

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Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



Republicans Begin To Ratchet Up Campaigns for Primary, a Year Away

The Republican primary is a year away, but party Pooh Bahs in Lansing and Washington already are treating gubernatorial contender Dick DeVos and Senate hopeful Keith Butler as presumptive nominees.

A big reason is that several prospective formidable contenders in each race have opted out. Among such Senate prospects last week was Domino's Pizza boss David Brandon, a University of Michigan regent who will be heard from in years ahead.

Another reason is that DeVos, a wealthy West Michigan businessman, and former Detroit Councilman Keith Butler, a pastor with a flock of about 20,000, have roared out of the starting gate with considerable media glare. Their competitors, far less known in the party, toil in relative obscurity and with less money.

DeVos, one of the nation's top donors to the GOP, and Butler, founder of the Word of Faith International Center in Southfield, are solid with conservatives who dominate the Michigan GOP.

Last week, DeVos ratcheted up his campaign with announcement that Detroit-born Matthew Dowd, chief 2004 campaign strategist for President George W. Bush, will be senior adviser to the DeVos campaign.

"It's sad for me to see my home state struggling so much while

states across the country are seeing their economies rebound and move forward," Dowd said in a press release from John Truscott, who was communications director for ex-Gov. John Engler and just named to do the same for DeVos.

DeVos also announced Greg McNeilly, former executive director of the Michigan GOP and campaign media director for the National Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, as his campaign manager.

This week, DeVos will announce more high-powered consultants with Bush connections. Among them: media consultant Alex Castellanos, whose campaign belt is notched with nine senatorial and six gubernatorial campaigns.

The DeVos steamroller does not intimidate another GOP gubernatorial contender, Sen. Nancy Cassis, R-Nowi.

"I'm not ready to concede," she said Friday in Lansing, where, as chair of the Senate Finance Committee, she is a major player in the GOP-ruled Legislature's efforts to reach agreement with Gov. Jennifer Granholm on tax and budget issues. "It's just too early to crown the next standard-bearer for governor."

Another Republican senator, Valde Garcia of Howell, threw in the gubernatorial towel last week but Rep. Jack Hoogendyke of Kalamazoo remained. The Rev.

Jerry Zandstra, program director of a Grand Rapids religion-oriented think tank, has been active as a contender to oppose U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

On Friday, Butler won endorsements of U.S. Reps. Candice Miller of Harrison Township (who opted out of the Senate race but left the door slightly ajar for a gubernators bid) and David Camp of Midland. Camp said "I've known Keith for many years and I am confident that not only will he be able to put a successful campaign together, but more importantly he has the qualities and ideas our state needs in the U.S. Senate."

Officially, Republican State Chairman Saul Anuzis and Republican National Chairman Ken Mehlman are neutral on who should challenge Stabenow and Granholm, although Butler fits in with Mehlman's push to get more African-Americans as 2006 statewide nominees across the nation.

Anuzis and Mehlman see the writing on the wall of reality: Barring a stumble by DeVos or Butler—prompting a gubernatorial bid by Miller or a Senate bid by Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land—they view DeVos and Butler as de-facto nominees.

George Weeks is the political columnist for The Detroit News and is syndicated by Superior Features.

Escaped Convict Caught in Wisconsin

Garfield Lawson, an inmate from the Baraga Maximum Correctional Facility who escaped Saturday afternoon, August 6, was captured without incident, along with his accomplice, Kathy Sleep, a food service employee for the corrections facility, in Wisconsin early Monday morning, August 8. Correctional facility officers were placed at the Mackinac Bridge toll booths to patrol a possible exit attempt out of the Upper Peninsula for the two persons.

Mr. Lawson, 35, was sentenced to life in prison in 1999 on three counts of assault with intent to murder, assaulting a jail employee,

and carrying a weapon with unlawful intent, according to the Corrections Department's Web site. Mr. Lawson also escaped from the Saginaw County Jail in 1997 and was captured two years later.

Ms. Sleep, 42, is believed to have aided Mr. Lawson's escape from the Baraga facility, escaping with a Department of Corrections food truck, which was recovered in L'Anse.

According to the L'Anse Michigan State Police, the two are being held in the Marathon County Jail in Wisconsin, and may be transferred back to Michigan.

Edison Sault Electric Co. To Host Tours

Edison Sault Electric Company will host self-guided tours at its hydroelectric plant Friday, August 12, and Saturday, August 13. The tours begin at the east end of the plant near Alford Park in Sault Ste. Marie and will run from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. each day.

The celebration is in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the Soo Locks, operated by the Army Corps of Engineers in Sault Ste. Marie.

The Edison Sault plant is the longest horizontal shaft hydroelec-

tric plant in existence. The structure is a quarter mile long, with the power canal providing the water to run it just over two miles long. The facility is constructed of stone and steel; much of the red sandstone that was used was excavated from the power canal during its construction.

Additional stone from the excavation was used on other landmarks in Sault Ste. Marie.

Photographs and a video of the construction of the facility will be displayed.

Where Is the Outrage on Water Rate Increase, City Loan?

To the Editor:

The citizenry of St. Ignace has now been paying for the financial mismanagement of our community for some two months now. I would ask, "Where is the outrage? Does anybody realize what is happening?"

Our community, the beautiful town of St. Ignace, has been dealt an unfair and bloated water rate. Personally, I am now paying 20 to 30 additional dollars per month as a result of someone's fiscal irresponsibility.

Perhaps my fellow community members do not realize what is going on here. Our city not only raised our water rates, but additionally committed another half a million dollars of *our* money to save themselves from a potential shut-off of gas and electric utilities.

The accumulating deficits began in 2001 and continued until this year, despite warnings from auditors. It would appear to me that our city leaders are unable to manage our tax dollars and water revenue responsibly. Why should the people be held responsible?

The talk of additional taxes to support our government irresponsibility has been raised at the City Council. Any additional costs to the citizens of our community should be greeted with some anger and outrage.

The fact that our community is at least half a million dollars in debt needs to be addressed at all levels. The fact is that I'm uncertain whether this is only as far as we have sunk.

Questions abound. Does anyone beside myself care? Who was responsible for the "interdepartmental" transfer of funds? How did our leaders allow our community to fall into such debt? What are they really doing to insure there is no additional costs to me or you?

The big question, however, is who was responsible for this water rate increase and the mammoth loan the city needed to maintain gas and electric service? Was it Mayor Dodson, Treasurer Elmer, or City Manager Heckman? Someone, anyone looking out for the interests of St. Ignace, should have been listening to the auditors since 2001.

The city of Marquette recently recalled several commissioners. It may be time for us to consider the same. Our government is supposed to work for us. The time is now to make these people responsible and hold them accountable.

I, for one, will do so on an ongoing basis and I hope others will do so as well. The fiscal mismanagement of St. Ignace cannot be tolerated. It costs us money.

Kenneth Perala
St. Ignace

County Should Be Thankful for Animal Shelter Volunteers

To the Editor:

I just finished reading the article regarding the Mackinac County Animal Aid Association (MAAA) concerns. I read in disbelief! Is Dawn Nelson talking about the same organization that I know of? The organization which prides itself on a shelter more immaculate than any I've ever seen? An organization run by enthusiastic volunteers who love animals, feed them top quality foods, and don't want to have any dog or cat euthanized? The people I've met who are connected with MAAA put in hours and hours of labor cleaning and caring for animals, many dollars of their own money, and much of their time raising money to give the animals top-notch treatment and care. The fundraising events have been well run by dedicated, hard working, well organized, and professional volunteers.

After reading the article, I can only think that there has been some major miscommunication somewhere along the line, or that there is some other political motivation for the negative comments made. Mackinac County should be bowing, scraping, and thankful that they

have these well-intended MAAA volunteers around, instead of chastising them and their work.

Louise A. Anderson
Phillip N. Schaeffer
Moran

People Need To See Shelter First-Hand

To the Editor:

With all the negative publicity that the Mackinac County Animal Shelter has been receiving lately, I felt compelled to give credit where credit is due. The Mackinac Animal Aid Association (MAAA) has worked very hard to improve the shelter since they took over operations in April. I had adopted animals from the shelter before MAAA took over and have since volunteered at the shelter. Let me tell you what a difference MAAA has made. The shelter has gone from smelling and looking terrible, to a place where I would recommend everyone go and visit and adopt a wonderful pet.

It is very saddening to me to pick up the paper in this small community week in and week out and read of the animosity among community members. The animal shelter is open daily from 10 a.m. to noon. If you can't make it at these times, you can make appointments that better fit your schedule. Take the time to stop by the shelter and see for yourself that some opinions about the shelter aren't necessarily true. People need to see for themselves. Thank you, Ginger Valentine, for the outstanding job you do and the hard work you put into making the shelter a nice, clean environment. I've volunteered, so I've seen it firsthand.

Christina Bigger
St. Ignace

Highly Recommends Father-Son Course

To the Editor:

For several decades, my family and I have enjoyed the beauty of the Les Cheneaux Islands as we have spent several weeks each summer living in the area. There, we have enjoyed the friendship of many of the year around residents and wondered in the natural beauty throughout the area. This year we added another jewel to our experience as we became acquainted with Paul Wilson and his work at the Maritime Museum in Cedarville.

My son, Paul, and I read of Paul Wilson's sponsorship of a mentoring project for father and son combinations at the museum through a series of articles in *The St. Ignace News*. We embarked in the program in mid-June and spent several hours each week working with Mr. Wilson building a working model of a Marblehead class, radio controlled, sailboat. This is not a model "kit" but rather a "from scratch" model which, when completed, will stand 84 inches tall and is 50 inches long. While we are not yet finished with the boat, we anxiously await its completion and the opportunity to sail it in the waters of Les Cheneaux and admire it on the mantle of our home in Ohio during the off months.

While we were working on our boat, we had the pleasure of watching Mr. Wilson build a canoe before our eyes, along with absorbing his expert advice as we built our model. He is, indeed, a craftsman who taught us never to use a power tool if a hand tool was available and to always carry a pocket knife. In building the model, we actually used many of the same techniques that would be involved in the construction of a full-sized sailboat. Most important, this model project provided a dad and lad the opportunity to spend time working together building a model sailboat that will certainly be a keepsake for both of our lifetimes and hopefully beyond.

We commend the staff of the Les Cheneaux Historical Society for their sponsorship of this program and enthusiastically recommend it as a future project for any father and son who would enjoy spending time together while studying and enjoying the nautical history of the Les Cheneaux Islands.

Paul and Dale Dentel
Swanton, Ohio

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and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.