

What do you see as the single biggest problem facing students in Michigan, in terms of academic achievement?

I see the single biggest problem as inadequate preparation. Inadequate preparation breaks down into several areas. In schools that have not aligned the curriculum with grade level and high school content expectations, students are often not presented with the material they must learn to demonstrate academic achievement. With the strong emphasis on the importance of preparing ALL students, many teachers have not been adequately prepared to differentiate their instruction to support the learning of all students. If the school district does not provide funding for professional development (targeted at the needs of schools, students and teachers), teachers do not receive adequate in-service training to enhance their skills. Schools and communities are inadequately prepared for a new, more global approach to preparing students. Students are inadequately prepared to select the high school courses that will benefit them best for college, other postsecondary education and work. This can be the result of inadequate counseling or the plethora of choices among unequal options (i.e., basic math, algebra concepts, algebra, algebra I, integrated math, business and consumer math, statistics). Many high schools offer more than 50 different math courses into which students are “sorted” because algebra I and II are “too hard for them.”

If you were given a magic wand and could change anything about K-12 education, what would it be?

I would wave my magic wand over the whole country and give everyone high expectations for student success, whether they were parents, children, single people, employed or unemployed. Everyone would know that all students can learn and would care about providing appropriate support to each child to ensure that each one would be successful. Once that magic settled in, all children would have enough to eat, would get enough sleep, would have a place to do homework every night, would have a caring adult to look over the homework and give supportive feedback, and would have freedom from fear because all of these things are the foundation for student success.

I was curious as to what were your views of service learning in the education system?

True service learning, as opposed to a community service requirement, is one model for providing instruction in a manner that allows students to become engaged in their own learning. It can provide relevance to a student’s education – answering that question “Why do I need to learn this?” A well executed service learning program can also help students see themselves as part of the broader community. School districts have the option of creating service learning courses (project based learning) as a vehicle to teach academic content.

What are your thoughts pertaining towards encouraging college-bound high school seniors to enroll in college courses? Do you think it would help or hinder their maturation progress as a student? Is there any chance that

the state or local government would subsidize the cost of the course to those in financial need?

Your question specified college credit earning courses for college-bound seniors. I think all high school students, especially juniors and seniors, should have the opportunity to take college-level courses. It gives students the opportunity to see the level of work expected of college students and to see the level of responsibility a student is expected to take for his/her own learning. There are several state legislative provisions that should allow students access to college credit earning opportunities. On the MDE website you can find a brochure that outlines the college credit earning opportunities that are currently available:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Early_College_Credit_09.08_249739_7.pdf Most costs for these opportunities are covered by the school district, especially dual enrollment, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate. When students take Advanced Placement courses, the federal government provides grant funding for students from low income families to take the test to get college credit for the course.

Have you in your experiences seen an improvement in school systems where the administration has switched the weekly schedule to block (or other kind of creative) scheduling?

We do not collect data on the type of scheduling that schools use, although we heard, anecdotally, that many were moving to a trimester configuration to allow for more opportunities for credit recovery and electives. I'm guessing that you mean an improvement in student achievement when you ask the question. That would be an interesting study for an ambitious grad student! The kind of creativity I am beginning to hear more about is the increased use of online learning and an increase, though slight, in project based learning. Since this trend is just beginning, our data is also just beginning to accumulate and is inconclusive at this point.

What effect has NCLB had on Michigan's schools? What about increased testing more generally?

NCLB has revealed data about students that show the teaching and learning gaps. This has prompted a discussion about effective teaching and teacher preparation. With an increased focus and better data we are also seeing some comparisons between states that prompt discussions about proficiency and skills. The down side is that we already knew that some kids in some districts were not receiving a top-notch education and the remedies are neither quick nor cheap. The up side is that we are all working to craft remedies. I'm not a real fan of testing, but I also know that we need a reliable way to measure what students know and how well-prepared they are. I'm not sure the text-heavy paper and pencil tests are the best measure of what students know and can do. Performance assessments seem better but are unwieldy to operate, sustain and standardize.

What are (the state's) plans to lower the high school drop out rate? Are you developing alternative education plans for students in disadvantaged neighborhoods that have a hard time attending school? What outreach programs does the state have planned to help this underprivileged students?

The data we are collecting now is much more reliable than past data collections that were based on estimates and projections. This provides a baseline to see where the critical points are for dropouts. There are many alternative education programs throughout the state to try to help students complete school or return to school. My fear is that the decision to funnel a student into an alternative program is a decision that is made to the detriment of the student. Often alternative programs are of lower rigor and do not prepare a student for any kind of education and training beyond high school and also do not prepare a student for a job that pays well. True alternative programs that provide rigor and relevance and effective instruction are rare. There are several pilots going on now in Michigan utilizing more online learning to allow students to take courses for credit from home or at school or on a college campus. These pilots are designed for students that have a hard time attending school full time. They hold promise for us to break out of the box (one teacher and 30 kids sitting in a room).

Are there plans to establish a more equitable funding policy in Michigan?

I'm guessing that you are referring to the fact that some districts receive more than others for the foundation grant because of the way Proposal A was enacted. Despite its shortcomings, Proposal A took a huge leap toward equalizing funding to school districts. Now that the state provides the bulk of the funding, it is not dependent on property values in each town. Schools currently receive around \$7800 per pupil. There are a few districts with substantial local funding that receive much more. With a still vigorous emphasis on local control, it seems unlikely that those districts would send their local funds to other districts. It also seems unlikely that the state Legislature would appropriate millions more to the State School Aid fund in these tough economic times. When state and federal funds are combined, we (Michigan) spend approximately 13 billion dollars on K-12 education. We may want to begin thinking about how to spend the dollars differently rather than spending more dollars.

With the big increase of obesity in the country, what do you think about requiring students in grade school to have a mandatory hour of PE per day?

I love it! Can we please do that for all workers, too? However, that doesn't mean it will happen. I think it is great that PE was included in the graduation requirement even though it was only one credit. The fact is that kids are in school for only about 7 hours a day and 35 hours a week. That leaves 17 hours a day and 133 hours a week for other learning and activity. This goes beyond education to become a cultural issue. Do we value physical activity as a society, a community, a family? How do we get all of us up and moving? We can

mandate (and must pay for) all we want in schools, but this is a much larger issue.