

November editorials address Michigan's school funding

K-16 Coalition for Michigan's Future ballot measure proponents will meet November 29 to regroup. It should believe the voters [who defeated Proposal 5] and work with the state legislature with these precepts as a guide:

- Education, both K-12 and higher education, is important for Michigan's future. Improved educational achievements are critical to Michigan's and the nation's survival.
- Funding of education and essential governmental services needs are linked.
- Shifting costs from one level of government to another is not a solution.
- School personnel health care, pension costs and benefits need to be reviewed and revised.
- Governance structure and administration must be addressed to ensure efficiency. Michigan has 768 local school districts and 57 intermediate school districts. Do we really need that many?

We know the legislature has been considering some of these items, such as health care. We're not suggesting these be acted upon this session or piecemeal but rather in the context of discussions on replacement of the Single Business Tax and overall general fund and school aid fund revisions and priorities. Done right, we believe taxpayers will support the necessary funds for education.

Source: *Lansing State Journal* editorial, 11.24.06

Point – Five ways schools can save real money

The bad news arrived after the election campaign ended: Michigan's budget is unexpectedly short \$170 million....Schools face up to \$160 per pupil less from the state.But by thinking differently about the way they operate, schools can absorb the cutback and perhaps generate enough savings to expand programs. The Mackinac Center think tank in Midland [has helped] us come up with five ways schools could save money.

1. Privatize non-instructional services.
2. Purchase reasonably priced health insurance.
3. Consolidate smaller districts. They all have fixed administrative costs that could be trimmed through consolidation.
4. Share services with neighboring districts.
5. Sell off assets.

None of these proposals are all that radical. But they do require school officials to unlock themselves from the status quo and stand up to the special interests that feed off the schools. If they are truly focused on improving their services, they'll give these ideas an honest look.

Source: *Point/Counterpoint* columns are excerpted from the *Detroit News* 11.24.06

Counterpoint – Time to make tough budget choices

For shoppers and lawmakers, it comes down to time and money. Neither have enough of both. Earlier this month, voters told the education community that a ballot proposal for a guaranteed funding increase wasn't the best way to help students. So now we must identify how best to help schools provide the education that children need.

Thinking about public policy may not be as exciting as holiday shopping, but it would have greater returns. Think about the time and money spent on holiday trappings. Consumers will spend an estimated \$457.4 billion on the holidays this season. That's comparable with the total annual spending on public education from kindergarten through high school for the entire United States.

But unlike so many holiday gifts that are forgotten by mid-January, public policy that helps people has measurable returns. So...get engaged. Hold those newly elected officials accountable for the promises they made in the barrage of pre-election commercials sandwiched between your favorite TV shows. There will still be plenty of time to scratch more items off your shopping list.

–Iris Salters, president of the Michigan Education Association

The views expressed in these articles do not necessarily reflect the thoughts and opinions of MASA.