



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Board Approves Education YES! Accreditation System

The State Board of Education today approved a new state accreditation system after receiving input over several months from diverse audiences across the state, including educators, parents, business and labor, and legislators.

Under Education YES!, schools will now receive grades of A, B, C, D-Alert, or Unaccredited under the new system. Every individual school building in Michigan will now receive seven letter grades, six individual grades - Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) achievement status, MEAP achievement change, MEAP achievement growth, indicators of engagement, indicators of instructional quality, and indicators of learning opportunities - and an overall composite grade.

“This truly is an accreditation system for the 21st century that helps Michigan align with new federal mandates,” said Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins. “Our schools, teachers, and students are more than just a single test on a single day. This system will also present parents and communities with a clear, definable status for their schools. The Board’s leadership and vision on this issue signifies the dawning of a great day for education in Michigan. Our Board members are all consummate public servants who work to ensure that Michigan children have the best opportunity to become productive citizens.”

The Board also voted unanimously to create an Accreditation Advisory Committee to make recommendations for baseline scores to be used for the school performance indicators and the student achievement indicators. The Committee will be composed of five nationally recognized experts in accountability, measurement, school improvement, and state accreditation systems. Under a proposed timeline, schools will receive their first report card in December 2002, and a diagnostic guide for improvement.

Board members also voted unanimously on an amendment to the Education YES! system to include social studies MEAP scores.

“I have been advocating for the inclusion of high school social studies test results in our accreditation system for years,” said Kathleen N. Straus, State Board of Education President. “This new system recognizes the importance of this subject alongside mathematics, reading, and science. We need to ensure our students are learning the important ideals our society is founded upon. I am also completely supportive of the new arts education standards that we have also included in Education YES!”

The system takes multiple measures into account when grading school districts, and factors in MEAP achievement data, teacher quality and professional development, continuous improvement, curriculum alignment, extended learning opportunities, arts education and humanities for all students, advanced course work, school facilities, family involvement, student attendance and dropout rate, and four-year education and employment plans for high school students.

Board members also said school districts will receive advance notification on individual school building accreditation status before the information becomes public.

Finally, by ratifying the Education YES! proposal unanimously, the Board exercised its constitutional authority as spelled out in the Michigan Constitution, Article 8, Section 3.

A copy of the Education YES! document can be found at the Department of Education’s web site, www.state.mi.us/mde.

In other business, Board members received a school finance study they commissioned, titled *From Proposal*

MORE

A to Proposal A+.

The report, authored by Dr. Neil Theobald of Indiana University, a respected education finance expert, identified key issues regarding public school finance and is a starting point for dialogue regarding public school funding in Michigan.

The report, funded by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL), seeks to stimulate discussion among education, government, and business communities. Theobald interviewed more than 30 governmental, educational, and business leaders in the state for the report.

“There is widespread agreement that the way we changed school funding with Proposal A has had a tremendous and positive impact on many of the school districts in Michigan,” Watkins said. “Today, Proposal A is like a 1994 automobile. It may still run and function, but it needs an engine overhaul. Policy makers have a responsibility to review decisions to see if they withstand the test of time and to see if changes are needed.”

Four issues addressed in the report include:

- **School construction/infrastructure funding** - Significant numbers of interviewees would like to see the state subsidize costs for low-wealth school districts, and see more intergovernmental sharing of facilities among schools, cities, and parks.
- **Administrative costs** - interviewees had several objectives in this area, such as providing administrative services most effectively, and establishing and reorganizing more collaborative and integrated cross-sharing of resources
- **Access to local millage** - individuals interviewed for the report criticized property tax as a source of revenue for education, and gave Proposal A a great deal of credit for leveling the playing field. Interviewees also expressed some support for increasing options for local government to raise additional funds for school enhancements
- **Declining school enrollments** - interviewees made two distinctions on types of declining enrollments - declining enrollments driven by demographics, and by parental choices. Interviewees also said this area has latitude in which the State Board can develop recommendations.

In the coming months, the Department of Education will disseminate the report to lawmakers, the education community, and business and labor organizations and hold public hearings throughout the state to receive input from citizens on school financing.

The report will also be available on the Department’s web site, www.state.mi.us/mde.

Finally, the Board unanimously approved a policy framework and standards for virtual school districts. A Virtual District is a collaboration formalized by written agreement between two or more schools in two or more districts.

The policy framework and standards include legal conformity, enhanced educational opportunities, self-assessment, professional development, collaboration, information technology infrastructure, communication, and planning. In the next few months, Watkins will direct staff to create an implementation plan to encourage the creation of Virtual School Districts.

The next meeting of the State Board of Education is scheduled for Thursday, April 11.

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