On Feb. 11, Gov. Granholm gave an encore performance in a Joint Appropriations Committee hearing, presenting her executive recommendations for the 2010-11 budget (the last time she appeared before this committee was her first year as governor). Granholm’s demeanor at this presentation was more assertive and forward than we’ve seen in the past. She painted a picture of the dire situation plaguing the General Fund and School Aid Fund and pleaded with legislators to enact budgets that demonstrate meaningful reform and serious investment in education.

As detailed below, this budget proposal includes several bold reforms relative to retirement and retiree health care for public school employees and a service tax. The School Aid Fund would make out quite well in the proposal. The governor proposed leaving school funding flat and there would be no further significant decreases in categorical spending. Granholm told the joint committee that she would “veto any budget that makes further cuts to education” or SOS has developed legislative priorities which have been approved by the MASB Board of Directors as well as the Michigan Association of School Administrators and other key organizations. This shared legislative agenda will allow MASB and SOS to work in tandem toward the shared goal of creating structural and financial reform of Michigan’s education system. “MASB and SOS are aligned in their legislative priorities. MASB is committed to addressing the education structural and financial reform. SOS will act as the conduit for these efforts,” said MASB Executive Director.
SET SEG & Thrun Law Firm present...

Negotiating Employee Benefits: Stories, Strategies & Solutions

Negotiating employee benefits in the current economic climate can be an even more complex task for districts. Administrators want to save on health insurance costs but are concerned about maintaining labor peace. This spring, SET Employee Benefits and Thrun Law Firm will address these issues during panel discussions across Lower Michigan.

Panel discussion content
Panelists will include a representative from Thrun Law Firm, SET SEG and school administrators who have implemented innovative benefit programs. Content will include:

- Examples of cost-saving employee benefit plans;
- Negotiation tactics for districts trying to reduce employee benefit costs;
- PA 112, becoming the “policyholder;”
- Saving opportunities for experience-rated districts; and
- Insurance carrier options.

Cost
There is no cost to attend.

Dates & Locations
Seminars will begin at 9:00 a.m. and conclude at noon. Continental breakfast and lunch will be provided. Save the date for the location nearest you:

- March 5: Gaylord University Center
- March 15: Genesee ISD, Flint
- March 17: Holiday Inn West, Kalamazoo
- April 22: Lansing Community College West Campus

Registration
To register, visit www.setseg.org. Select “Company Events” from the menu at the top of our home page. Then select the location of choice.

Register today!

1-800-292-5421
Budget, continued from front page

that kicks the responsibility of settling
the budget down the road. Essentially,
she publicly pledged to preserve edu-
cation funding and sign a balanced full
budget—she claims that she will veto
a continuation budget. Additionally,
Granholm urged lawmakers to adopt
a two-year budget cycle and pass this
year’s budget by July 1.

The education community often
waits for a piece of legislation to be
perfect before they support it, even in
concept. The risk we run is that by the
time we’ve agreed to support a pro-
posal, the opponents of the legislation
have mounted their efforts and effec-
tively killed the bill. We’re at a crucial
crossroads and we must move quickly
to help our cause. We can continue to
lobby for improvements to the plan,
but we must first get momentum in
our direction or we may get nothing.

The proposals presented by the
governor would stabilize our school
retirement and funding system and
save districts money in the long-term,
while continuing to offer an attractive
system for employees. Her budget also
includes a sales tax on services with all
of the revenue going to K-12 educa-
tion. This is coupled with a phased
in plan for business tax relief by
repealing the Michigan business tax
surcharge and a change in the gross
receipts tax.

The governor’s plan is based on a
proposal offered by Business Lead-
er and vision coverage
to individuals who retire after
this year, saving the health system
10 percent of its total current costs.

• Increase retirement multiplier to
1.6 from the current 1.5 for eligible
employees as part of an incentive
to retire this year. It would increase
an individual’s pension income
by approximately 6 percent per
year. Doing this will increase the
retirement rate for districts for five
years, but most, if not all, of that
cost will be paid for by employees
as part of a 3 percent increase in
the employee contribution rate.

• Eliminate dental and vision
coverage
to individuals who retire after
this year, saving the health system
10 percent of its total current costs.

• Require anyone who works over
30 years start using a 401K-type
retirement system. This would cap
their total cost to the defined ben-
fit system at the 30-year mark.

• Create a new retirement system for
all new employees that would be
a hybrid defined benefit—defined
contribution system, reducing the
pension cost for school districts.

• Require that any new person
entering the system be age 65
before he/she can start collecting
pension or health care benefits.
This reduces costs by a significant
amount, but since it only applies
to new hires the savings won’t be
realized immediately.

Sales tax reduction and expansion
to services

• Decrease the sales tax rate to 5.5
percent and expand it to include
services; additional revenue of
$550 million in 2011 would go to
the School Aid Fund to prevent
cuts in education.

• Reduce the Michigan business tax
surcharge by half in 2011 and com-
pletely eliminate it in 2012.

• Reduce the gross receipts tax on
businesses from .8 percent to .6
percent over two years starting in
2012.

• This proposal is intended to be
revenue neutral in the short-term,
but offers greater growth in the
future for K-12 funding.

The governor announced many big
steps and bold initiatives. Time will
tell whether this talk becomes real-
ity—there’s still a long process in the
legislature for this proposal. There are
some questions and details that need
to be worked out, but that can hap-
pen as bills move through the process.
These bills give schools retirement
savings in the long-term, stabilize
both the retirement and funding
systems and eliminate any cuts in next
year’s budget. Why would we not push
passage of these as soon as possible
and fix the small issues along the
way? Failure to act quickly will lead to
almost certain failure.

Call your legislators and tell them to
support these proposals for stabilizing
the school retirement system and the
expansion of sales tax to services. We
need both passed so that districts can
plan budgets in the coming year.

For questions, contact Don Wotruba,
dwotruba@masb.org, 517.327.5913 or
Peter Spadafore, pspadafore@masb.
org, 517.327.5912.
Director Kathy Hayes. “We’ve made this a top priority for our staff and are contributing considerable staff time and resources to the effort.”

The shared legislative priorities are as follows (for MASB’s complete legislative agenda, visit www.masb.org, Services & Products/Government Relations):

Cost savings/reform measures
- **Statewide health insurance pool.** We believe the concept of allowing access to a statewide health care pool for all public employers is deserving of serious consideration for the long term. However, it will likely take several years to implement and will do little to reduce costs immediately.
- **Mandatory premium sharing and cap for all public employees.** We support legislation that requires all public employees pay a minimum portion of their health insurance premiums, and that a maximum dollar cap be established for the employer contribution. Given the urgency of our current situation, and comparisons between private sector and public sector practices, we believe that premium sharing is needed and justified. Statewide premium sharing can be readily implemented, with near-term savings for schools.
- **Increasing employee contributions for MPSERS.** There are a variety of approaches that may help control costs. SOS is open to discussion, including accepting that current and future employees will need to pay a larger share of the costs, or alter benefits, in order to maintain the long-term viability of MPSERS.
- **Reset minimum age requirements to collect retirement health care benefits.** Currently, school employees can retire and receive insurance benefits after 30 years of service. In many cases, this means they retire and begin collecting benefits in their 50s, which creates significant costs for the payment of health care benefits. We’re in favor of setting a minimum age of 60 for newly hired employees to collect retire health care benefits.
- **Promoting sharing of services.** We encourage school districts to continue evaluating current management systems and to collaborate and share services where it makes economic sense.

Collective bargaining
- **Self-help.** We’re working together to better educate and support school district boards and managers about collective bargaining and how to work within current law to achieve their goals.
- **Balancing collective bargaining laws.** Changes in current law are needed to better balance power at the bargaining table. We’ll seek changes in the Public Employment Relations Act (PERA) to:
  - Prohibit automatic increases in pay or benefits from going into effect if a contract isn’t settled.
  - Create more effective mechanisms for enforcing current laws regarding illegal strikes.

Finance and funding
- **Make current voted 18 mill non-homestead charter mills.** Currently, schools must hold elections to renew their 18-mill non-homestead millage. The passage rate is essentially 100 percent. Chartering the 18-mills would lower election costs and simplify school funding.
- **Moving all tax collections to summer.** This will assist schools with cash flow issues and provide uniformity.
- **Sinking funds.** Currently, schools have few local options to raise revenues. We propose expanding the allowed uses of sinking funds to include purchases of school buses, software and for other approved operational purposes. Local voters approve sinking funds so impor-
A reformed state and school funding system

- **Short-term**: A goal of restoring all cuts and returning to 2008-09 levels of funding. For schools this can be done by a combination of cost saving measures with new revenue sources to provide equity, stability and more opportunity for growth in the short-term while we work on systemic changes.
- **Long-term**: Engage in a comprehensive review and overhaul of Michigan’s school funding system based on data provided by the Citizens Research Council study of Michigan’s K-12 education system that is currently in progress.

IMPORTANT “checks and balances” are already in place.

**A reformed state and school funding system** that includes:

**Short term**: A goal of restoring cuts and returning to 2008-09 levels of funding. For schools, this can be done by a combination of cost-saving measures with new revenue sources to provide equity, stability and more opportunity for growth in the short-term, while we work on long-term systemic changes. Practical measures can be implemented by the legislature to address state and school funding, such as:

- Closing wasteful or ineffective loopholes in current tax laws.
- Expanding the base of the sales tax to services.
- Eliminating planned reductions in the income tax rate.
- Compensating schools and local governments for unfunded mandates identified by the Legislative Commission on Unfunded Mandates.

**Long-term**: Engage in comprehensive review and overhaul of Michigan’s school funding system based on data provided by the Citizens Research Council (CRC) study (available at www.masb.org). The short-term remedies for the ailing school funding system are just that—short-term. Using the information and data gathered by the CRC study we plan to create a comprehensive, long-term transformation in both funding and the delivery of education in Michigan.

"Fixing what’s wrong with state and school funding is probably more of a marathon than a sprint," said Tom White, chair of SOS. "We need parents and communities to contact their legislators and media, and stay in contact over time, in order to reform Michigan’s school funding system. We hope that Lansing will rise above political partisanship and narrow self-interests in order to do the right thing. If Lansing fails to act, educational and extracurricular programs will be devastated over time. We need to tell Lansing to do its job on behalf of our kids and our state."

It’s important in the coming weeks and months that the school community engage its community at large to call on legislators to “do their job.” The changes that need to happen are critical to the future prosperity of our state, and need to happen swiftly regardless of the fact that it’s an election year.

To learn more about SOS, or for resources to get involved locally, visit www.SOSMichigan.org.

**SOS member organizations**

Michigan Association of School Boards  
Michigan Association of School Administrators  
Michigan School Business Officials  
Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals  
Tri-County Alliance  
Middle Cities Education Association  
Michigan Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development  
Michigan Negotiators Association  
Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association  
Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education  
Michigan Association of Middle School Administrators  
Michigan Parent, Teacher and Student Association  
Michigan High School Athletic Association  
Michigan Association of Pupil Transportation  
Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators  
School Equity Caucus

* As of 2/11/10.
Districts have options with expired contracts and impasse

Highlights

• Districts have options in making changes to expired contracts.
• Must ensure that all due diligence is done before declaring impasse.
• Expect unfair labor practice claim.

As the school year passes the mid-way point, many school boards are still trying to settle expired collective bargaining agreements. Unfortunately for the boards, even though a contract is expired, it continues to produce increased personnel costs for the school district. Under the Public Employment Relations Act (PERA), school boards are unable to make unilateral changes in wages, hours or other existing terms and conditions of employment after the expiration of a collective bargaining agreement. Thus, contract provisions that relate to salary and health benefits continue past the life of the agreement.

This means that if employees are contributing zero dollars to their health insurance plans, they’ll continue contributing nothing even after the expiration of their contract, regardless how much the insurance rates increase. Further, a salary grid with step and lane increases will also survive the contract, allowing teachers to receive compensation increases for progressing from one “step” to the next in years of experience and moving to new “lanes” based on educational attainment (e.g., completion of 20 hours of college credits beyond a bachelor’s degree).

Consequently, teachers may lack an incentive to settle a contract if the district must continue to pay 100 percent of health insurance costs, and on average, a 6 percent salary increase based on their entire step and lane increases. In fact, an Administrative Law Judge for the Michigan Employment Relations Commission (MERC) recently recognized in an opinion that “[a] union’s incentive to reach agreement is obviously less when the employer proposes a ‘give back,’” and the union only has “an interest in avoiding layoffs that may result if the parties don’t agree to salary concessions.” (See Sandusky Community Schools and Sandusky Education Assoc. MEA/NEA, Case Nos. C08 I-198 and C08 1-201, pg. 6.)

Although, because such layoffs traditionally result in larger classrooms and reduced educational offerings, “avoiding layoffs” would appear to be more of an incentive for a school board to settle a collective bargaining agreement.

So, is a school board powerless in watching its personnel costs increase while negotiations are stalled and there appears to be no hope in settling a contract that can keep the school from adopting a deficit budget? No. PERA prohibits parties from making changes in wages, hours or other existing terms and conditions of employment after the expiration of a collective bargaining agreement unless they reach a good faith bargaining impasse.

Once a bona fide impasse has been reached, a school board may lawfully make unilateral changes in working conditions, such as changes in salary and health insurance, provided that such changes aren’t substantially different or greater than the last offer that the school board proposed during negotiations. Although not specifically defined under PERA, the MERC has generally described “impasse” as the point at which the positions of the parties have solidified that further discussion would be futile. When a union files an unfair labor practice (ULP) in response to the declaration of an impasse, the MERC judges the impasse on a case-by-case basis, considering a number of factors, including whether there has been a reasonable term of bargaining, whether the parties have participated in mediation, whether the position of the parties have become fixed, and whether both parties are aware that their positions have been solidified. If a school board fails in establishing that impasse was reached to justify implementing its last best offer, MERC will issue an order that requires the school board to restore the terms and conditions of employment that were applicable prior to the impasse.

A decision to declare an impasse and implement changes in working conditions requires careful consideration and guidance from the district’s legal counsel or labor consultant. Because a ULP claim will likely always follow a declared impasse, school districts must be prepared to defend their actions before the MERC, which may result in additional legal or consultant fees. In a way, declaring impasse and implementing a contract is similar to terminating a tenured teacher. If a school board wishes to terminate a tenured teacher, it must understand that failure isn’t an option when arguing the case before the Tenure Commission. The district is making a substantial financial investment in paying legal fees to remove the teacher, and the worst case scenario is to have the teacher return to the classroom. Similarly, a school board must be sure that it has “good facts” before it plays the impasse card. While it may be a wise financial investment to incur legal or consultant fees in exchange for savings related to paying health insurance and salaries, losing an impasse case based on “bad facts,” however, provides nothing in return for the expenses related to defending...
New! MASB’s cooperative workshops help districts take action to maximize resources

As families, businesses and the state struggle to stretch scarce resources, it’s important to make informed decisions and show your community and legislators that your district and board are committed to looking at all options to increase efficiency and save resources without compromising education.

MASB is excited to announce workshops aimed at assisting districts with exploring ways to save dollars and share resources. The goals of MASB’s new Take Action! Cooperative Workshops are to educate districts on opportunities for cooperative action with other districts and to help them be accountable in their roles as stewards of taxpayer dollars. It’s important to note, however, that by cooperative action we do NOT mean consolidation of districts. Each workshop will include two sessions led by a team of MASB facilitators. The first session will be a comprehensive work session where action plans will be developed and meaningful discussion will occur to explore cooperative initiatives as well as examples of best practices. The second session will be a follow-up opportunity for participating districts to give progress updates and to discuss strengths and opportunities for improvement. It will also serve as a way to keep the momentum strong so participating groups can continue to reap the rewards of cooperative action.

The workshops will be hosted at ISDs/RESAs around the state and ISDs and RESAs are being asked to take the lead in inviting their respective local districts to participate. The cost of the workshop (two sessions) start at $1,200 plus mileage—whether you’re looking for the small team appeal or a large session with multiple stakeholders.

Every district in Michigan is facing financial challenges like never before. With little past experience on dealing with school budgets during a recession, it’s essential that districts explore every possible opportunity to save dollars. If districts don’t explore opportunities to collaborate and consolidate services, it’s expected that forced consolidation of services and districts will be a hot political agenda item in the coming months.

To learn more about the Take Action! Cooperative Workshops, contact Angel Davis, adavis@masb.org, 517.327.5926.

Highlights
- Workshops aim to educate districts on opportunities for cooperative action.
- Can help you save valuable resources and improve efficiencies.

Impasse, continued from previous page

the union’s ULP when a school board is required to restore the expired contract.

Examples of “bad facts” could include, but aren’t limited to: (1) three or less proposals are made prior to the impasse and imposition, (2) the parties haven’t yet attempted to utilize the services of a mediator, (3) the school board uses impasse as a bargaining tactic to get more than it needs to address its budget problems, (4) the board lacks a legitimate business necessity to declare an impasse, (5) it’s not clearly established that both parties are unwilling to compromise, and (6) the parties are still engaged in substantive discussions regarding the issues that are unsettled. Further, while protracted bargaining is a factor in determining whether impasse exists, it’s not determinative. For example, even if the parties have been negotiating for over a year, if the negotiations have lacked formal proposals, the MERC will likely place little emphasis on the length of the negotiations.

Bargaining in the face of adopting a deficit budget will likely require school boards to be more aggressive during negotiations. Reaching an agreement is the ideal end result to collective bargaining. However, if a compromise is unattainable, a school board doesn’t have to stand idle while personnel costs push the district into deficit.

Remember that MASB can be a valuable partner during difficult negotiations. MASB’s Employment Relations Information Network (ERIN) is a comprehensive online resource for employee relations and contract and negotiation data for school boards. It allows a user to compare salary information for districts individually or by demographic group, compare fringe benefits for teachers by county, region and district enrollment type, and access specific contract language from other school districts. MASB uses experienced labor consultants who are prepared to assist your district with its labor relations needs, such as contract analysis, collective bargaining, grievances, arbitrations, fact-finding and MERC hearings.

For more information, contact Brad Banasik, bbanasik@masb.org, 517.327.5929.
Controlling the rising cost of employee benefits is on every school district’s list of collective bargaining goals for 2010. Several proposals that mandate changes in public employees’ health care benefits are being considered by Michigan lawmakers, but school district negotiating teams will be under tremendous pressure to implement cost-effective changes in contracts this year.

SET Employee Benefits is partnering with Thrun Law Firm to present a series of panel discussions throughout lower Michigan focused on health care bargaining strategies and solutions. Included on the panel will be representatives from school districts that have made health insurance changes that have positively impacted their organizations.

Any school administrator or board member engaged in the collective bargaining process should save one of the dates below and register to attend this panel discussion. There’s no registration fee and continental breakfast and lunch are provided to participants. On-site check-in at each venue begins at 8:30 a.m. and the panel discussion kicks off at 9 a.m. Lunch will follow no later than Noon. To register, go to www.setseg.org and click on Company Events. Select the location of your choice (see box below) and complete the online registration form. Registrants will receive verification via e-mail.

These informational sessions will cover the following subjects:
- Examples of cost-saving employee benefit plans.
- Negotiation tactics for districts trying to reduce employee benefit costs.
- How to become the “policyholder” using PA 112.
- Saving opportunities for experience-rated districts—those with 50 or more covered employees.
- Insurance carrier options.

Please register now to secure a seat at these in-demand panel discussions. For more information, visit the SET SEG Web site, www.setseg.org, or call Communications Manager Cindy Hoogasian, 800.292.5421, ext. 646.

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2010 FRN Conference
Washington, D.C.

Approximately 75 Michigan school board members joined their colleagues from across the nation at the Federal Relations Network Conference to call on our nation’s leaders to make education a priority.

Top left: U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan addresses attendees. Duncan told school board members that the federal government wants to increase federal funding for education even as it challenges states and school districts to “raise the bar” on student achievement.

Top Right: MASB Deputy Director Don Watruba participates on a panel, moderated by MASB Executive Director Kathy Hayes, with other state association executives and lobbyists on how Race to the Top is affecting their states.

Bottom: Secretary Arne Duncan poses with NSBA leaders, including president-elect Earl Rickman, Mount Clemens Community School District (second from right).
A report from the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) finds that Michigan’s laws, rules and regulations governing the teaching profession fail to ensure that all students will have effective, well prepared teachers.

Specifically, the report finds that teacher policies, in Michigan and across the nation, largely work against the nation’s goal of improving teacher quality. According to the report, “While the national focus on teacher quality has never been greater, the broad range of state laws, rules and regulations that govern the teaching profession remain broken, outdated and inflexible and too often impede rather than promote serious reform.”

The evaluation of each state was organized in five areas encompassing 33 goals, including teacher preparation, evaluation, tenure and dismissal, alternative certification and compensation. Michigan earned the following grades:

- Delivering well prepared teachers: D
- Expanding the teaching pool: F
- Identifying effective teachers: D-
- Retaining those deemed effective: C-
- Exiting those deemed ineffective: D

Michigan earned an average overall grade of D-, compared to the national average overall grade of D. Keep in mind that this review was completed last year, before the Race to the Top legislative package passed. That package included several laws designed to address this issue, including teacher evaluation and alternative certification policies (see Headlines, Jan. 11, 2010). Michigan was praised for its requirement of induction for all new teachers. Specific areas for improvement noted in the report include:

- Michigan’s evaluation and tenure policies don’t consider what should count the most about teacher performance: classroom effectiveness. Michigan doesn’t require any objective measures of student learning in teacher evaluations and doesn’t require annual evaluations for all teachers. It also doesn’t require that districts collect or consider any evidence of teacher effectiveness as part of tenure decision.
- Michigan makes it too difficult for districts to attempt to dismiss poor performers by failing to articulate a policy for dismissing teachers for poor performance separate from dismissal policies for criminal and morality violations. Michigan also allows multiple appeals of dismissals.
- Although Michigan claims to offer an alternative route to certification, its burdensome requirements block talented individuals from entering the profession.
- Michigan’s requirements for the preparation of elementary teachers don’t ensure these teachers are well prepared to teach reading or math.
- Teachers in Michigan can teach grades seven and eight on a K-8 generalist license, although their preparation is the same as teachers of early elementary grades.
- Michigan sets low expectations for what special education teachers should know, despite state and federal expectations that special education students should meet the same high standards as other students.
- Michigan fails to exercise appropriate oversight of its teacher preparation programs. The state allows programs to admit candidates without passing a basic skills test.

To learn about guidelines to rectify what the authors see as substandard policies, visit www.nctq.org/stpy.

**Highlights**

- Michigan praised for requiring new teacher induction.
- Newly passed laws aim to correct policy deficiencies and better prepare Michigan for 21st Century.
First Lady announces new initiative to fight childhood obesity

Childhood obesity is a growing problem in our nation. In the past 30 year, obesity rates have tripled in the U.S. If the trend continues, today's children may face a shorter expected lifespan than their parents.

A new foundation, the Partnership for a Healthier America, seeks to address this serious situation. First Lady Michelle Obama will serve as the honorary chair of this foundation and has launched a new campaign aimed at solving the childhood obesity epidemic within a generation. The campaign, Let's Move, has four main goals:
1) Offer parents the tools they need to make healthy choices for their kids.
2) Get healthier food in schools.
3) Improve access to and affordability of healthy foods.
4) Increase physical activity and get kids moving.

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) has issued a statement in support of this campaign. “The First Lady is right on the mark when she says that commonsense, innovative solutions are needed to empower families and communities to make healthy decisions for their children,” Executive Director Anne Bryant said. “To be successful, this initiative will require local, state and federal agencies to work together toward a common goal.”

NSBA is looking for at least one board member in every state who will serve as a visible champion in the campaign against childhood obesity. If you’re interested in being a champion for Michigan, contact Stacy Washington, swashington@masb.org, 517.327.5936.

To learn more, visit www.letsmove.gov or www.healthiergeneration.org.

Two Idaho lawmakers want to pay students to graduate early

In a move designed to save the state thousands of dollars, two Idaho lawmakers—a Republican and a Democrat—have introduced a plan called the Master Advancement Pilot Project that would pay $1,531 to students in the form of a scholarship to one of Idaho’s publicly funded colleges or universities, for each year they graduate high school early.

Currently, schools receive approximately $4,593 per student per year. Under the plan, districts would split the remaining $3,062. It would be piloted in 21 of the state’s 115 school districts and three of the 41 charter schools for six years. It’s due for a full hearing in the legislature in the coming weeks.

Source: Associated Press as appeared in Education Week, 2.9.10.

Principal flexibility results in improved attendance of teachers

In Chicago, a policy change that resulted in principals having more flexibility in dismissing probationary teachers led to improved teacher attendance rates, according to a study entitled, The Effect of Employment Protection on Worker Effort: Evidence From Public Schooling. The study was completed by University of Michigan Professor of Education Policy and Economics Brian Jacob.

A new collective bargaining agreement in 2004 gave principals the authority to dismiss nontenured teachers without elaborate documentation or a dismissal hearing. The report concluded that the new policy reduced teacher absences by 10 percent annually, and reduced the number of teachers with 15 or more annual absences by 20 percent.

According to a quote in Education Week by Tim Daly, president of the New Teacher Project in New York City, “Teacher attendance is an overlooked aspect of performance that we know has a direct impact on students.” Daly goes on to say that districts should take a look at attendance policies, “If you make it clear that attendance matters, teachers will put forth more effort.”

Source: Education Week, 2.3.10.

Mayor, continued from back page

which is why elected boards are the most common model.

The debate about whether the mayor—any mayor—should control the schools is an important one. It’s also important to sort out what the debate is really about. If the conversation is about money, control and politics rather than about kids, then the public has every right to be skeptical. Mayors can help improve education, but they aren't the silver bullets. Other things matter more.

What matters most isn't that the mayor has control, but that the mayor and the school leadership are moving in the same direction instead of pursuing competing agendas.
**News You Can Use**

- **Challenging course trump high marks.** Contrary to popular belief, it’s no more difficult for most students to get into college today than it was a decade ago. The shrinking acceptance rates cited in so many news reports likely come from a higher number of applications per student, according to the Center for Public Education. But taking more rigorous courses gives students an edge. A report from the Center for Public Education finds that taking challenging courses in high school is more important than getting good grades for students who want to get accepted by a competitive college. The report, *Chasing the College Acceptance Letter*, calculates that an average student who scores 21 on the ACT, has a 3.12 grade point average and completes trigonometry and chemistry has a 75 percent chance of being admitted to a “competitive” college. If the student completes precalculus instead of stopping at trigonometry, the student’s chances of admission rise to 79 percent. Furthermore, the study found that low-income and minority students are less likely to earn the necessary course credentials than white students. But in cases where they do take the more challenging courses, and perform the same as their white peers, their chances of getting accepted are just as good. *To learn more, visit www.centerforpubliceducation.org.*

- **Heavy media use linked to low grades.** A report from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds*, finds that over the past five years, young people have increased the amount of time they spend consuming media by an hour and 17 minutes daily, from 6:21 to 7:38. And, given the multitasking performed by young people, they pack a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes worth of media content into those daily 7½ hours. The study broke youth into three types of media users: heavy, moderate and light and found that 47 percent of heavy users reported fair or poor grades, compared to 23 percent of light users. Heavy media users also reported they got into trouble a lot and were often bored. *For the complete report, visit www.kff.org/entmedia/mh012010pkg.cfm.*

**Spotlight Videos**

- **Secretary of Education Duncan’s first year**
  
  [www.edweek.org/go/duncan1year](http://www.edweek.org/go/duncan1year)

  U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has recently completed his first year at the U.S. Department of Education. In these exclusive Education Week videos he shares his views on competition and Race to the Top, ESEA reauthorization, building a national team, the influence of foundations and the challenge of communicating the department’s message.
Editor’s note: Mayoral control of public schools has received growing attention nationally. MASB prepared a special issue of Headlines (Oct. 19, 2009) that focused on this issue.

Mayor Robert Duffy (Rochester, NY) is angling for control of the city school system, but for many reasons an elected school board remains the best option for students and parents in Rochester.

First, there’s no clear pattern between achievement gains and mayoral control. While some mayors have found it easier to clean up district-level finances and change management practices, it’s more difficult to make improvements in student achievement.

Mayoral-controlled systems tend to increase centralization and rely on top-down reforms such as higher promotion standards and adoption of a common curriculum. This one-size-fits-all approach may not work in every community, or in every school.

Truth be known, who is in charge is much less important than adequate funding. Currently, the state-funded Contracts for Excellence and federal Title 1 funds leave little room for local discretion. Neither the Rochester mayor nor the school board has much leeway when it comes to education spending.

Second, mayoral appointed school boards often shift important education discussions away from public forums and into political backrooms. Elected school boards, by contrast, are the official link between a community and the school system, responsible for assuring the parents and taxpayers that they’re being represented when decisions are made.

But most importantly, mayors appoint to the school board people who reflect their own political ideology. That’s great if you accept the current mayor’s philosophy, but what happens in the next election?

Meanwhile, school board elections encourage individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences to seek office. They also minimize the specters of undue political influence or patronage, and ensure that education doesn’t get lost amidst a host of other municipal fiscal priorities.

Collectively, the members of an elected school board balance the interests of both student and taxpayer.

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