

Crucial Conversations—Charters, Kryptonite and the “Other Half” of the Story

Tagged: [Newsletter](#) • [Oct](#) • [2010](#)

By: Darcie Birkett, MSBO President, CFO Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, Ottawa Area ISD

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Michigan School Finance Update

Tagged: [Newsletter](#) • [Oct](#) • [2010](#)

By: David Martell, Executive Director, MSBO

[MSBO](#) Executive Director David Martell highlights school finance issues, including the Education Jobs Bill and the Governor’s recent veto. We tell David that it’s good to be humble.

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By: Darcie Birkett, MSBO President, CFO Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, Ottawa Area ISD

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In the past two months we have seen the release of a new Citizens Research Council of Michigan (CRC) study on **Nontraditional K-12 Schools in Michigan**, the film **Waiting for Superman** and the Michigan League of Human Services study, **Right Start in Michigan – The Other Half**. The focus of this report, film and study is the state of education in Michigan and the country and the impact that certain socio-economic criteria can have on student achievement.

The CRC concludes that, “The data indicate that there are some excellent charter schools (just as there are some excellent traditional public schools), but that not all charter schools are excellent.”

A Center for Research on Education Outcomes found only 17% of the charters in this country out-perform the comparable local public school, while one-third were significantly worse. Charter schools have their own set of challenges. The CRC states in their summary that charter schools are generally popular with parents and fill a vital niche for troubled students. They conclude that there is a need to close failing charter schools and that, “the long-term value of charter schools may be that, as relatively autonomous schools, they are better positioned to explore innovative approaches to teaching and learning, within the constraints of their charters and state law.” Great charters should be embraced as innovative engines for the educational system, but we know they are not the only answer to the many ills facing public schools.

The student stories in the film *Waiting for Superman* are compelling, as is the controversy surrounding it. But remember, this film is directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*), so a compelling and controversial film should be expected. One of the reasons our schools are failing, according to this film, is because of the ineffectiveness of teachers and the teacher unions that protect them. I’ve seen clips from the film and heard some of the debate and while teacher unions seem to be “taking it on the chin” it’s my hope that this movie does not turn into a community discussion focused on bashing public schools.

If the public thinks that unions are why the United States now ranks close to the bottom in reading and math scores, think again. Finland’s academic test scores far exceed the U.S. and it’s a country whose workforce is almost totally unionized. Compelling statistics show that in the U.S., the states with the best-standardized test scores seem to be the ones with the strongest teachers’ unions. Perhaps unions in and of themselves are not the kryptonite weakening public education.

I plan to see the film later this month and as with all popular media, I will watch it with a discerning eye. As an “insider,” I know that for every failure highlighted in the film, there are educational success stories to match it. It’s okay that the film focuses on what’s not working in education. It generates the conversation that can lead to a greater understanding of the global complexities we all face. It is my hope that the film will lead to meaningful discussion in our schools.

A compelling report was just released in Michigan by the Michigan League for Human Services that reveals many urban children are starting out already behind. According to the report, children born in low-income communities are at higher risk of failing in school and in the job market.

The report, **Right Start in Michigan – The Other Half**, found nearly half of Michigan’s babies are born to mothers

in cities or communities that have populations larger than 25,000. It states that many of those children start life without the equal opportunities that can enable them to thrive, arrive at school ready to learn and to go on to become part of a highly educated workforce.

According to Jane Zehnder-Merrell, director of the Kids Count in Michigan project, “As we struggle in Michigan to get back to prosperous times and create a highly educated workforce, these measures are a dark cloud on the horizon. Disparities at birth fuel future inequities. Without early intervention, these disparities become the readiness gap in kindergarten, and the achievement gap in school.”

Quality experiences matter to young children, particularly those at-risk, and positively impact their school success as evidenced by several longitudinal studies. Positive foundations established in the early years pay huge dividends to school districts - resulting in fewer remedial and special education placements and higher graduation rates. As budgets become increasingly pinched, Michigan must continue to find creative ways to honor the research, and ensure success for “the other half”.

As a nation, and especially in the ranks of our school communities, we need to address many issues. We must remain open and be willing to look at both the success stories of public and charter schools and the stories of schools that are failing. Michigan’s educational challenge and this country’s educational challenge are to ensure that we engage all stakeholders in these “crucial” conversations. Whether you are a teacher or a parent, a business owner or a bus driver, a food service worker or a CFO, a custodian or an IT specialist...it’s your responsibility to engage in the dialogue, and to strive to create excellent learning environments for the students we serve. Collectively, we will far exceed what any single “superhero” can accomplish!

Educator Evaluations: A Business Managers Perspective

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By: Jeff Crouse, MSBO President-Elect CFO, Charlevoix-Emmet ISD

As you are probably aware MCL 380.1249 was signed into law on January 4, 2010 requiring “annual evaluations of teachers and administrators”. This new requirement certainly adds responsibility, requirements, and significant costs to school districts’ already strapped budgets.

While teacher evaluation remains a mandatory subject of bargaining, the immediate effect of this section of the school code does not give districts the leeway to wait for existing contracts to expire to address this section of the law, according to consulted legal counsel. Certainly increasing the required frequency of tenured teacher evaluations by 200%, from once every three years to every year, is going to add significant time and responsibility levels to administrative ranks. To compound matters, cutting administration has been the focus of significant budget cuts the past 5+ years in all our districts. Also in many districts, all or most non-tenured teachers have been laid off leaving only tenured teachers in the district, so this requirement is truly a 200% increase in the number of evaluations required over a 3 year period for those districts. Our current system of negotiated employee evaluations, a majority of which are embedded in labor contracts, include processes which may have up to ten separate process steps, including multiple observations over the course of a year. This is actually a required process for non-tenured teachers. While this may have been appropriate and attainable under prior law when our contracts were negotiated, we also had limited number of non-tenured staff and only every third year for tenured teacher to consider. This is an unsustainable process under the requirements of the new law.

While many districts are struggling with the possibility of having to hire outside help to meet these requirements, one philosophy that has surfaced to help address the added time required to complete these additional evaluations is to involve the teachers in the process. The concept of utilizing a mutually acceptable (negotiated) teacher self-evaluation tool could help manage a significant portion of the administrative workload for the additional two annual evaluations beyond the tenure act requirements. This is especially true for that vast majority of teachers whose performance is “satisfactory” or above. [The Widget Effect](#), a recently released study discussing teacher evaluation, uncovered some interesting data regarding teacher evaluation, including the fact that more than 99% of teachers evaluated were found to be “satisfactory” within the report. The report also goes on to discuss the many problems with our current antiquated evaluation systems. I would encourage you to read the [Executive Summary](#), especially if you are involved in developing evaluation tools for your district.

A self-evaluation tool and process can have many positive outcomes. Self-evaluation requires an employee to be reflective and involved in their own performance measures which could lead to more intentional instruction aimed towards the building improvement plan. The administrator would still retain the responsibility for reviewing the self-evaluation, collaboratively making any adjustments, and signing the evaluation as an official record. For this vast majority of teachers that are satisfactory or above, this could significantly address the time requirements for building administrators. One caution is to be sure that this self-evaluation tool meets the standards of the [1976 Beebe v. Haslett Public Schools](#) case, commonly known as the “Beebe Standards” for unsatisfactory removal of a tenured teacher. No business manager wants to pay out the thousands in costs associated with a tenure hearing only to lose AND pay back wages!

A similar self-evaluation tool and process could be used for the administrative evaluation requirement. Obviously the content of the evaluation tool would differ from that of a teacher. While there are as many definitions and interpretations of the definition of administrator as there are school attorneys in Michigan, this requirement may extend to the Chief Financial Officer in your district. If this is the case in your district, you will want to be part of the design phase of that evaluation tool. The uniqueness of our profession lends to the need of an equally unique evaluation tool, likely not the same measures as a principal evaluation tool.

Try to plug yourself into the conversations about educator evaluations that are happening in your districts right now. You may be surprised at what is being proposed in your district with unintended consequences to the district's bottom line.

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Mike Adamczyk, [MSBO](#)'s Immediate Past President, serves as the Chair of the Nominations Committee for 2010-2011. The [MSBO](#) Nominations Committee, comprised of the five most recent past-presidents, recommends candidates for the ballot for the [MSBO](#) Board of Directors.

As a reminder, the [MSBO](#) Bylaws state, names may be presented to the Nominations Committee for consideration and possible nomination by submitting a petition with at least 30 active member signatures to the committee chairperson on or before December 1 (petitions can be downloaded off the [MSBO](#) website.) If you're interested in being a candidate or would like to nominate someone for the committee to consider, email Adamczyk at adamczm1@ccsd15.net. If you would like more information about the responsibilities of board members or about running for the board, you may contact David Martell or Nancy Hawkins at 517-317-5920.

This year there are three board positions open.

Helping You Understand the Complexity of School Finance

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MSBO's **School Finance Reference Manual** helps you understand the complexity of school finance issues and addresses the numerous changes in school finance.

The manual is designed to help anyone interested or working in school business. It was developed with the needs of new business managers in mind. Whether you're a veteran business manager, a building principal, a staff member, a school board member, a superintendent, a Legislator, or an individual wanting to gain a better understanding of school finance issues; you would benefit from this reference tool.

The **School Finance Reference Manual** is on a searchable CD at a cost of \$75 for an initial purchase. Each year it will be updated to reflect the latest information on school finance at a discounted price. This year's update is \$40. [Order Yours Now!](#)

There are currently 26 sections in the Manual with numerous references under many of the sections. The sections include:

- Proposal A
- Headlee Amendment
- Foundation Grant Formula
- Individual Property Owner's Tax Bill
- Funding Schools In Michigan
- Cash Flow
- Budget And Budget Theory
- Retirement
- Sources Of Revenue: Bonds/Sinking Funds
- School Insurance
- Contract Negotiations
- Special Education / The Durant Settlement
- Student Activity Funds
- Bulletin 1011
- Bulletin 1014
- CEPI Forms Deadline/Contacts
- CEPI Collection And Submission Dates
- Michigan Department of Education
- Total Square Miles Per School District
- How a Bill Becomes Law
- Bulletin 1022
- Code Of Ethics/Internal Control Areas
- Statistical Information for School Districts
- The State Aid Act
- Glossary Of Terms
- Additional Resources

Spotlight on Award Winners–Dexter Community Schools and the 4-Bucket Plan

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Disposal of Obsolete Property

According to Dexter Community Schools business office, the district didn't have a good way to dispose of obsolete property. The key objective was to allow the community, parents, students, staff and surrounding communities the opportunity to purchase the obsolete equipment at a fair price.

That proved to be true and has generated \$71,000 for the district. All revenue realized from the sale of obsolete property has helped Dexter Community School's bottom line and is deposited in the school's general fund.

The 4-Bucket Plan

Sharon wrote the following testimonial as to why she applied for ASBO's Pinnacle Awards. "I was deeply passionate about developing a better 403 (b) retirement plan for our employees and through the cooperative effort of some of the best business manager minds in public education, we developed the 'perfect' 403(b) plan for our participants and school districts."

The employees at Dexter Community Schools and other school districts in the Washtenaw ISD and Wayne RESA 403(b) Consortium have realized the benefits of the 4-Bucket Plan since January 2009.

The four buckets allow participants to determine how much or how little involvement they have in their own retirement plan:

Bucket 1: Core Fund Line-up – This bucket contains a core line-up of 29 mutual funds across broad investment categories and provides a mix of actively and passively managed mutual funds. This bucket would be for the participants that would like to select their own investment portfolio, knowing that all options have been reviewed by investment professionals and determined to be the best in its investment class.

Bucket 2: Guided Portfolios – This bucket contains five custom asset allocation portfolios that are created out of the underlying core fund line-up (Bucket 1) and range from conservative to aggressive. A simple investor profile questionnaire leads the participant to one of the five portfolios. Most participants choose a Guided Portfolio.

Bucket 3: Mainspring Managed – This bucket is for the complete "please actively manage my money for me" approach. The Standard does everything to help the participant meet his/her retirement goals, including building a plan, determining contribution levels, managing the investments, providing access to a call center staffed with professional investment advisors, and providing ongoing statements to show progress along the way. All portfolios are created out of the underlying core fund line-up (Bucket 1).

Bucket 4: Open Brokerage Window – This bucket offers access to over 5,000 mutual funds, all without loads/sales commissions. This is a self-directed brokerage account through the Schwab Personal Choice Retirement Account (PCRA).

For more details on the Washtenaw ISD and Wayne RESA 4-Bucket Plan click on: <http://www.dexter.k12.mi.us/403B.cfm>

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Since 1910, ASBO International has provided programs and services to promote the highest standards of school business management practices, professional growth, and the effective use of educational resources.

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Expand your knowledge base or your support staffs', skills and confidence as an administrative professional at the 24th Annual Support Staff Conference for Administrative Professionals. This conference provides the opportunity for you to receive ongoing training and support from experienced instructors. It is a great way to jumpstart your [SAPC certification](#), or to get those last credits you need for completion.

As you review the conference brochure, take note of the presenters from firms, associations, school districts, and the state that are sharing their knowledge and provide top-notch professional development. Following are just a few of the breakout sessions:

REP–Dealing with Changes and Practical Applications
First Aid and Emergency Procedures in Our Schools
Multi-Tasking...Did They Actually Mean Doing the Jobs of Three People?
The Electronic Board Packet Wave
and much more!

Members: \$195 • Non-Members: \$235

One Day Pricing for [MIEM](#) Members: \$140 • Non-Members: \$175

[Register Now!](#)

[Detailed Brochure–Listing Breakout Sessions](#)

Lunch on the Lawn Highlights Michigan's School Lunch Programs

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School Meals play a vital role in the Michigan Economy. In FY 2009 more than 139 million school lunches, 44 million school breakfasts and 3 million school snacks were served to Michigan children.

The School Nutrition Association of Michigan (SNAM), invited state legislators to share in a school lunch featuring Michigan-made products at a special event held in late September.

"Lunch on the Lawn" was a SNAM legislative effort, which provided an opportunity for members to meet with their legislator(s) to discuss school meal programs in Michigan," Lori Adkins, [MSBO](#) member and SNAM Legislative Chair. "It was time to give our legislators real information about how successful school meal programs operate in Michigan."

Fast Facts About Food Service in Michigan

For more than a decade, school food service programs have participated in purchasing consortiums (Great Lakes, MOR and SPARC) in an effort to maximize purchasing power and lower costs to districts.

Food service programs across the state are participating in shared service agreements with other districts to maximize general fund dollars in the classroom.

Michigan agriculture is the second largest industry in the state.

School meal programs are a natural fit for supporting and expanding Farm to School programs.

The next [MSBO](#) Food Service Committee will be held this Friday, Nov. 5, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. at the [MSBO](#) Office.