

A STRATEGIC PLAN TO DIVERSIFY PUBLIC EDUCATION THROUGH THE
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DESCRIPTIVE INTRODUCTION

Perception takes a turn for the worse when there are forces, often outside of an organization, that seep into to the function of the organization and have an aggravating effect. In the case of the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the idea of lacking diversity has spawned several idealistic proposed solutions none of which have panned out effective. Schools of choice, charter schools, "No Child Left Behind" schools, and magnet schools have all been enacted to mundane or zero success. The players in the MDE, paired with the Legislature and various school boards and administrators, have tried unsuccessfully to solve the problem of figuring out how to diversify Michigan's K-12 schools and districts.

The issues facing the MDE are simple: dragging test scores, segregated communities causing mirroring segregated schools, and low education funding. The goal of the MDE is to reverse the first issue. The MDE also wants to solve the second issue even though it maintains a weak grip on the third. The problem is easy to see. Tweaking the second issue, a problem in and of itself, will not solve the problem of dragging test scores. The second issue *is its own separate issue, not a fix for another!*

That is why these three issues are problematic. The MDE does not see them as three distinct and separate issues. The MDE bounces one issue off another and tries to develop an umbrella fix. "If we integrate districts with schools of choice, the test scores will rise." they think. The better view, though, would be to examine the issue of

segregation separately from the issue of slumping test scores. Solve one problem, then another may solve itself. The MDE should not depend on that outcome, but they are welcome to hope for it.

Diversity issues exist locally, at a state-wide level, and are encompassed in both distinct districts and the headquartered offices of the MDE. Although segregation does occur in each individual district and will be looked at by the author, the approach to a solution will be more effectively examined at the organizational level of the MDE.

The author will show how a holistic view of diversity in education produces a better atmosphere for education. A better atmosphere enhances the learning environment and test scores may rise. The author will point out certain realities and perceptions that must be evacuated so that an invading sour perception can leave the operation of the MDE to allow room for improvement.

ANALYSIS LEADS TO A PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

THE HISTORY OF THE MDE

The history of the MDE is quite vague, although lauding and optimistic, in the description given on its website. "Even before statehood, Michigan was a leader in public education. In 1809 judicial districts created schools and levied taxes to support them." (Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2007) Yes, schools were built and subsequently paid for with money. The MDE discusses its involvement in shaping laws and pumps the continuation of its "leadership legacy" by explaining that "Board [of Education] members lead the way in improving public education through recommendations and actions that have resulted in key legislative changes." There are loads of leadership and legalese references lingering throughout the web presence of the

MDE and the author sees that as a representation of the organization's approach to diversity. The MDE views diversity through black ink on white paper, statistically, and legally rather than in the full rainbow of colors that make up the students and school districts in the State of Michigan.

This is in stark contrast to the University of North Texas's College of Arts and Sciences whose logo shines bright at the forefront of its web page and boasts the mission of "Promoting Excellence, Diversity, and Unity." (University of North Texas College of Arts and Sciences [UNTCAS], 2007) Diversity is a main focus, apparently the second priority of the school. The organization that runs Michigan's schools does not appear to cite "diversity" anywhere on its website.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Sometimes goals are explicitly expressed and other times must be hunted for. Such is the case with the MDE. As was previously stated, there is no up-front mission statement. The goals can be extrapolated from what is advertised front and center by the MDE, and that is "testing... graduation requirements... certification... preparation... and progress." (MDE, 2007) It is difficult to find anything about improved teaching methods or help for instructors in developing lesson plans. It is possible that such information is found under the covers of the tidily made testing and progress measuring beds.

One example of an explicit organizational goal would be to "enhance learning by empowering teachers" or something remotely similar. Visitors to the MDE site are left to their own devices to develop an individual perception of a mission. That is typically not a good thing for an organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the MDE seems to be coupling curriculum with meeting standards. This is evident upon viewing the "curriculum" site. Although the viewer enters through the "curriculum" doorway, he is promptly led into a divided room of "curriculum and standards" for K-12. If a teacher is looking for assistance in developing a fine curriculum, he would be at a loss. Rather than information, he would find a measuring stick. "These standards and more detailed learning objectives called benchmarks are contained within the Michigan Curriculum Framework." (MDE, 2007) It turns out the curriculum is built on a foundation of benchmarks. This is hardly a user-friendly objective, meaning the holistic approaches of "learning to learn" or "multi-faceted education" are thrown directly out the window.

The author would inform this organization that it is difficult to build a frame without the proper tools. It is like putting the cart before the horse.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The MDE consists of sixteen separate and distinct offices. Each office possesses a director. None of the offices' respective names come one iota close to "diversity." Technology, finances, and education law appear several times over. In fact, each of those elements repeats itself at least thrice in the departments' names. For example, there are offices for Audits, Financial Management, Grants, School Finance, and State Aid which account for five of the sixteen offices. Yet, there is no "Office of Diversity" or anything close to it.

The culture of the MDE is one of administration, financial tidiness, and assuredness of legal accountability. The culture of the MDE is not one that constantly thinks diversity first... or second or third or even sixteenth.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

WHAT WILL BE CHANGED

The analysis of this organization's face and its presentation to the community it serves leads the author to a purpose of developing a strategic action plan. The proposed action plan will piggy back the previous analysis of the face of the MDE and its willingly conveyed poor perception. The citizens of the State of Michigan deserve an education system that is diverse and focuses on a diverse student and teacher population. At its core, the MDE must commit to fostering deep rooted attitudes that will express themselves in the billboards, both physical and electronic, that the organization uses to promote itself.

The action plan will form strategic means of addressing the concern of lacking diversity in the countenance of the MDE. The basic strategy is to explore and promote diversity among the participants of the organization, mainly the students and teachers. The strategy will be clarified by noted areas of lacking and thriving diversity in similar organizations, associations, and communities.

The action plan will include those involved in its implementation: students, teachers, and the administration. The plan will explain how each must participate to promote the objective. The action plan will lay out a general timeline, with an emphasis on a sea change that should begin immediately. Strengths and barriers will also be examined.

WHO WILL CHANGE

STUDENTS - A TIMELINE, STRENGTHS, & BARRIERS

ADDRESSED THROUGH THEORIES, CONCEPTS, & PRINCIPLES

The first method by which to enhance the education of the students by exploring diversity would be to enable students to be individuals within a social mixing pot. The MDE, in redeveloping its approach to curriculum (and teacher-student relations), needs to expound on the strengths of the individuals and how each student can contribute to the group's learning environment individually. It can be shown that "the crucial factor is not just the existence of a social context, but rather the psychological meaning of the context for each student. A particular identity group's degree of success in school, for example, is a function not of social context per se, but rather of the meaning of this context, and this meaning can differ dramatically from one group to another." (Bracher, 1999) Each student, especially and including minorities, needs to grasp their selves and contribute as themselves to the group dynamic. Students need to acknowledge that doing "well, in school... understood by some as 'acting white'" is simply not a good idea. Each student can do well on his own in his own skin. One piece of the diversity strategy proposed to the MDE would be to build the individual and show how each has a place of contribution.

Another piece of the diversity solution would be to promote the "team" aspect of teachers and students. One classroom participant (including teachers and students) is not the superior of the other. Students exemplify this. Teachers must be willing to accept it. The MDE must be ready to promote it. "While many college students [read "teachers"] begin... expecting to "help" the children, what, in fact, develops is a mutual recognition

of assets and satisfaction of needs that leads to a deepening of individual potential and agency for the participants... The "helping" framework that many students [read: "teachers"] start with is problematic. Most college students [read: "teachers"] who arrive at the University of Michigan have been educated at schools that can prepare them for institutions of power in our society." (Paul, 2007) Yet, they cannot seem to grasp the team concept necessary to communalize the classroom into a reciprocally beneficial and thriving environment. The MDE needs to step in now and preach this gospel.

TEACHERS - A TIMELINE, STRENGTHS, & BARRIERS

ADDRESSED THROUGH THEORIES, CONCEPTS, & PRINCIPLES

A strength of any classroom or school district is its diversity. "Multicultural classrooms, will grant equal opportunity for 'different voices, different signifying systems, and interpretive styles'" but are not a complete saving grace nor super solution because "multicultural contact in classrooms does not erase the history that lives in students', or the values of their teachers and the school systems that determine the curriculum." (Bloom, 1998) Teachers must realize that diversity is a strength on its face, and teachers must simultaneously understand they must not assume that the acceptance and promotion of diverse classrooms is a magic elixir.

It is important for teachers to get this because the administration at the top of the MDE may only promote diversity. To stimulate new ideas and an invigorated approach to diversity, it is probable that the MDE administration may only focus on the benefits of diversity. It is this adjoining theory, that diversity is great but does not eliminate history, that may only account for a minor paragraph in a new MDE manual promoting diversity. Also, it is almost impossible to completely erase the values of the teachers. This is a

major point: diversity just does not occur by integrating a classroom. It only can be effective if the teacher is aware that he is a proponent of the integration. The teacher has history and values, not just the students. The author advises the MDE administration to recognize this and convey the sentiment directly to teachers appropriately and emphatically.

A barrier within teachers is their knowledge of self and how they relate to the group. What appears a strength, knowing thyself, can also be a weakness. See how one woman studied explains that "ethnicity or roots (ancestors) [are] causal forces for her ethical decisions: "If I had a company in Mexico I don't think I would exploit my own people." (Hawisher, 1999) What the teachers must avoid is assuming that they should maintain direct focus on like minority students. This just is not the best case. A teacher does not have to try to avoid exploiting a minority student, rather, an encouraging acceptance of that student into the group would be almost a "reverse exploitation." Perhaps exploiting by definition, this inclusion and "use" of a minority student to affect the group is but one example of a contribution to the betterment of the group.

To do this, the teacher must be trained (by MDE) to take the initiative of promoting "a multicultural perspective for students whose own background or ethnicity they have never seen represented in school tasks." If a teacher really wants to see what students are capable of, perhaps the teacher should attempt a holistic approach to lessons, maybe have black students get into their own groove. For example, one teacher "had them reading from Baldwin's essay 'If Black English Isn't a Language . . .' which sprang from an earlier discussion of vocabulary [he] didn't know, and their reading ability really impressed [him]." (Roskelly, 1998) It is a wonder that the MDE does not promote this

already. Pulling out what students already possess is the best way of encouraging fresh knowledge. When a student feels successful, new ideas seem less of a chore.

ADMINISTRATION - A TIMELINE, STRENGTHS, & BARRIERS
ADDRESSED THROUGH THEORIES, CONCEPTS, & PRINCIPLES

The timeline for administrative action must step on the right foot. Apathy and whining does not help in any way. When Louisiana was hit hard with a massive hurricane in the mid-2000s, there were two ways to proceed: either gradually or with slightly bated immediacy (i.e. a subdued panic). After the act of God, "most of the city's white families ... retreated to neighboring parishes or put their children in private schools... Drained of this middle-class constituency and the political support that it provided, the New Orleans Public Schools [spiraled] downward. Year after year, attempts to increase local funding for the schools fail to gain support in citywide elections. Year after year, the bountiful profits of the New Orleans tourist industry and the oil and gas resources that have lined corporate pockets and federal coffers so handsomely, fail to find their way into the city's education system. Mismanagement and infighting on the Orleans Parish School Board feed the perception that the system is broken beyond repair." (Dingerson, 2007)

Statements like these harm an administration. Perceptions reach out like tentacles, especially poisonous ones. The author sees missteps in almost each of the above statement's sentences. First, there was an immediate retreat. The retreat did not develop by chance. Obviously, there was a preconceived readiness to do so. The readiness was developing in the white families for some time previously and must have been encouraged by the public school system's lack of ability to rebound. For the MDE

to prevent a retreat of this nature in Michigan's public schools, the organization should prepare before this happens. Granted, there will probably not be a hurricane in Michigan any time soon, there is always a cloud of possibility that, given an instigating force, a massive exodus to the private schools will occur. For timeline's sake, this must be prevented before it happens, meaning that planning does not occur post atrocity. The change begins today.

The Dingerson statement also points out that there are ample funds available, but not being transferred, to New Orleans schools. It is because those with the money have no faith in the NO Schools' administration to properly use the funds. Currently, Michigan is out of money. Hopefully and most likely, this is but a temporary barrier. However, the day that money becomes available, the MDE must have a rooted trust therefore making the department a first recipient of hand outs. Again, for timeline's sake, the change begins today.

The strength of the MDE is shone through a time of weakness. The strapped Michigan economy produces a less than vibrant and thrifty atmosphere. The MDE has a fantastic opportunity to build a strong bridge now, in times of weakness, and then walk on it later. Unlike the NO Schools, who built a weak bridge that buckled under a traveling mass exodus, the MDE can start its sea change now and fix any mismanagement or infighting problems now, while Michigan citizens see the strapped budget. Now is the best time to act! There is no better day than tomorrow to reap the benefits of an organizational tidiness that began today, in times of uneasiness.

Statistics must be omnipresent in the decisions of the MDE. If the façade presented is to be a pleasant one, then certain negative statistics must be avoided. An "us vs. them" mantra can never enter a successful discussion nor promote a strong marketing approach. If there is a diverse population in the community, each group must be represented in the school system appropriately. Otherwise, there becomes a gigantic mess of things.

Take law school, for example. In 2003, "there were 99,504 applicants to the Fall class [of potential law school students]. Of those test-takers, only 68.1% were white (non-minorities)." (Randall, 2007) Yet, some schools' admittance varied drastically from that percentage. Law schools from every geographic area including the University of Richmond and the University of South Carolina (representing the south), Marquette University (the mid-west), and the University of Montana and the University of Idaho (the western United States) all admitted well over 92% white students to their respective incoming classes that year. Those statistics are detestable. In any school district, if 60% of the residents are white, then no school should have enrollment greater than 75% white. A major study would need to be done to figure out the exact percentage window, but for purposes of this strategy plan to the MDE, the simple line is this: demographics of the population will match demographic make-ups of the schools within that population. It starts now. If schools need to be realigned to begin to accomplish this massive feat, so be it.

Another major misuse of statistical data is standardized testing grades. Throughout the history of the MDE, standardized tests have been deployed. However, this is a poor measuring stick because the population of Michigan simply is not

standardized. Furthermore, it is impossible to develop a test that scores objectively.

Again, look to the poor example that law school sets. It is "estimated that at least 90% of law schools have admission practices that presumptively deny applicants based on how they fall on a grid formulated around LSAT [the law school admissions test] and Undergraduate Grade Point average (UGPA). It is this misuse of the LSAT that has a discriminatory impact. For example, based on a LSAT cut-off of 145, over 60% of black applicants will be presumptively denied, but only 20% of white applicants will be "presumptively denied." (Randall, 2007) It is quite easy to see that, by definition, the LSAT is not a "standardized" test. However, it presents itself thusly as do Michigan's standardized tests. Simply put, it is the advisement of the author that the MDE needs to jump off the standardized test band wagon pronto.

HOW IT WILL CHANGE

A MAJOR SHIFT STARTING WITH LEGISLATION

In 2006, The United States Department of Education (the federal version of the MDE) admitted that it knew "little about the trends in student enrollment during the recent expansion of school choice options," continuing "little is also known about the trends in the demographic composition of students in public (assigned and chosen) and private schools." However, the U.S. Dept. of Ed. did admit that "traditionally there has been a divide in sources of funding for public and private schools, with state and local governments supporting public schools and with tuition, fees, private endowments, and donations supporting private schools." The department continued its confession by reasoning that "the dependence of private schools on tuition tends to limit private school enrollment to families who can afford it. Families who can afford sending their children

to private schools are usually ones who are highly educated and earning incomes much higher than the median family income." (U.S. Department of Education, 1999)

This is groundbreaking information. In this scenario, "groundbreaking" does not mean "sensationalistic," rather it literally means "ground breaking." In other words, the MDE can use this instance of incontinence to develop a solvent approach to the matter at hand, diversity. Solutions can be offered to eliminate these admitted truths.

"The children from educated and wealthy families are more likely than other children to attend private schools. (U.S. Department of Education 1996) Other data from the 1993 to 2002 October supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) show that students who attend publicly controlled schools are more racially and ethnically diverse than students who attend privately controlled schools. The data show that in both years, 33 to 38 percent of students enrolled in public schools for elementary and high school grades were non-White compared to 20 to 24 percent of students enrolled in private schools." (United States Department of Education, 2006)

A SPRINGBOARD TO LEAP FROM

This is the springboard that the MDE can use to begin its shift, or sea change, toward embracing a vibrantly diverse culture of students. Because public schools are more diverse, the MDE can use it as a tool to build a new framework of expanding ideas and all-encompassing education. The statistics laid out in the preceding paragraph are the fodder that eager legislators hunger for. Public schools are diverse and the administration should empower its diverse lot of pupils to simultaneously nurture the learning environment through the team atmosphere that teachers will promote. The writing is on the wall. It is time to enact the plan and with immediacy.

FEASIBILITY

All safety nets were cast these past few years when the budget started to fizzle in Michigan and the funding ran out. The greatest facet of this plan to encourage a diverse education to a diverse population will happen at no better time than now. It is totally feasible since the economic climate simply cannot get worse. Although that is poor logic, it is reasonable to assume that a rebound is upcoming. The MDE is in its backswing currently and its actions now determine the outcome of the follow through. This plan will work because it is geared toward the populace. There is simply no way that a majority of the citizens in Michigan will deny a plan that benefits them. The means by which the MDE sells this plan are laid out within its structure. Understand the target audience and its diverse nature and then explain how the MDE must shift from specificity to all inclusiveness. The public will buy what the MDE sells if the MDE is truthful in its conveyance of the eminently successful plan set forth.

EFFECTS WHEN ENACTED BOTH POSITIVE & NEGATIVE

HOW TO MEASURE RESULTS

The positive effects of this strategy are infinite. When education is brought to each and every individual in the pool, and each student adapts to it and learns from it, the possibilities are endless. One positive effect would be non-targeted testing. Eventually, grading will reflect effort put forth rather than socio-economic status at birth. Equality from the word "go" means equality at the finish line.

Another benefit would be an elimination of the private-school superiority stigma. When the diverse population receives a better education in the public sector instead of the private, standardized testing will inevitably reflect that. Or, when standardized testing

removes its biases toward the majority, then too will the testing accurately reflect the education and effort put forth. A systematic improvement paired with individual participation leads to bigger and better things. There are so many possible benefits of diversifying Michigan's public school system.

The results are measured by participation and fluid performance of the plan. This strategic movement is not tested by standard exams nor numbers. It will not be working simply by an increase in minorities who go to college. The statistics will bolster when the statistics are shaped to the outcome. In the meantime, the MDE will see the results through the literal eyes of the members of the Board of Education, the students, the parents, the teachers, the legislators, and itself. When schools are not divided by race and test scores are not predictable by ethnicity, these are the beneficial results. And, they will come.

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