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HEADLINE: **High school** reform efforts begin in **Michigan**; **MICHIGAN AP CENTERPIECE** and **CAPITAL FOCUS**

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DATELINE: LANSING, **Mich.**

BODY:

Howell Public Schools Superintendent Chuck Breiner envisions a day when **Michigan's high schools** have flexible schedules that provide classes late into the evening.

Schools would have fewer students so teachers could pay more attention to each one. Instruction would be more practical, with hands-on experience supplementing traditional textbooks.

The future already is taking shape in Howell, a growing Livingston County district that is building a second **high school** and making other changes to be on the cutting edge of reform. The movement is gaining momentum nationwide as the United States seeks to improve its economic competitiveness and improve student performance in writing, math and science.

"If we were to mine the data we have available on how we are doing, I think we'd find we're not doing very well," Breiner said of **high school** performance across the country. "Nationally, **high schools** are lagging."

The **Michigan** Department of Education has hired a **high school** redesign consultant to help address possible areas of reform, including teacher development and student testing.

The process will be aided by a National Governors Association grant, paid for by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, that will bring **Michigan** up to \$1.8 million over a two-year period. **Michigan** was one of 10 states to receive a grant.

The state may consider tougher curriculum standards for **high school** students across **Michigan**. Revamped testing policies already are in the works to better gauge what

students learn and how well they are prepared for college and employment.

One of the biggest changes comes in the 2006-07 academic year, when the current **high school Michigan** Educational Assessment Program test is dumped in favor of a test based on a college entrance exam.

But turning around **Michigan's high schools** likely will be a slow, difficult process.

Politicians, business leaders and educators say it must happen because the world has changed and schools must change with it to better prepare students for the job market. **Michigan** won't attract jobs of the future if it can't provide an adequately trained work force, they say.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has said the state must double the number of college graduates in the next decade to remain economically competitive. **Michigan** ranks 36th among the states with about one-quarter of its population aged 25 or older with at least a bachelor's degree, according to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The national average is 27.6 percent, and the most educated states - Massachusetts, Colorado, New Hampshire and Maryland - have rates exceeding 35 percent.

"This is a historic time for us," said Mike Flanagan, **Michigan's** K-12 schools chief. "We are either going to make it or break it in the next few years, on our watch."

The success of reform could hinge on early models that some **Michigan** districts are undertaking on their own.

Battle Creek Central **High School** launches an aggressive reform this fall. The 1,800-student school will be reshaped into subdivisions, or "communities," of up to 350 students each.

The goal is to give students a better chance to make personal connections with a teacher or staff member, preventing students from falling through the cracks of a large, impersonal system.

Teachers also will be split up among the smaller groups, and each teacher will be assigned to 10-15 students as a "family advocate."

Howell **High School**, with about 2,600 students in grades 9-12, is one of the largest in the state. The district already is part of a pilot program, supported by **Michigan** business leaders, to encourage students to tackle a tougher curriculum.

The district plans to open a second **high school** in 2007, reducing the number of students in each building and improving the chances of personal connections.

Howell already offers some alternative scheduling for **high school** students. But a second

building could help expand those offerings, said Breiner, who wants buildings open from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. to maximize their potential and afford the most students a chance to attend classes.

Today's traditional **high school** schedule - starting early in the morning and ending around 3 p.m., with summers off - was established decades ago when the U.S. population was dominated by farming families and child labor was a crucial part of the economy. That schedule may not make the most sense today.

Neither may the tightly regimented, one-hour class structure that has dominated for decades, Breiner said. Students may learn better if instruction relied more on individual responsibility and interactive technology than lectures and textbooks.

"We dispense secondary education in a way that ignores how many students learn," Breiner said. "The traditional way doesn't work for a lot of students."

With that in mind, Dearborn Virtual Academy mixes up its schedule. Students are required to take a few online courses and perform community service along with their more traditional classes.

"This effort is just beginning," state Board of Education President Kathleen Straus said of the reforms. "We don't have all the answers yet."

On the Net:

Michigan Department of Education: <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>

GRAPHIC: AP Photo of Aug. 5: MIAG101