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**Testimony Senate Bill 619
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**Michigan House Education Committee
519 House Office Building**

Your Challenge

"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, or more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.

For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order, this luke-warmness arising partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the laws in their favor; and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it."

The Prince – 1515

Niccolo Machiavelli

Thank you and good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee.

I am here this morning to ask you to continue to be bold, courageous, creative, and innovative in seeking ways to provide Michigan's great teachers with the tools necessary to educate ALL our children.

In 2005 leaders did not hesitate to act when I recommended in my report:

The New Education (R)evolution e-learning Reforms for Michigan -----

that Michigan assure that all children have exposure to and benefit from e-learning as a high school graduation requirement. Leaders acted and Michigan led – as the first state in the nation to require such an experience.

We are living in a hyper-competitive, disruptive, transformational, technological driven, knowledge economy where ideas and jobs can and do move around the globe effortlessly.

Our children are no longer competing with the student at the next desk, district or state next door. Our children **MUST** be prepared to compete and collaborate with the children of the world. It is up to **us, all of us** as legislature citizens, and responsible adults to seek ways for our children to be ready for this world they will inherit.

As you develop new laws for our state schools I respectfully suggest you generally focus on the following:

- 1) Be thoughtful and be bold
- 2) Ask does this change, policy or legislation advance high quality teaching and learning
- 3) Ask if it truly helps “our teachers teach and our children learn?”
- 4) Is it about Teaching, Learning and Children or it is simply protecting the status quo and more about Power, Control, Politics and Adults?
- 5) Does it enrich the adults or children?

- 6) Does it advance Quality Teaching and Learning – the ONLY adjective that should matter before the word SCHOOL is QUALITY – a lousy traditional, charter, cyber or is just that.

As President Abraham Lincoln once remarked “Simply calling a horse’s tail – a leg – does not make it so”.

- 7) Remember rhetoric from the state capital never educated a single student. Supporting, engaging and listening to our great educator is paramount.
- 8) Be pioneers – not settlers when it comes to advancing QUALITY teaching and learning. Specifically as it relates to Senate Bill 619
- a) uses the criteria I outlined above as you review, adjust or modify this Bill
 - b) Remember, to understand, like a building a car – quality cannot be inspected into a cyber school – or any school at the end. It must be built in along the way.
 - c) Clearly look for academic achievement and results – yet don’t be deterred with artificial arguments that simply protect the status quo.
 - d) Remember, unless you establish” a “quality screen” – the old Chinese saying comes into play: “Once you have opened the window – all the flies can come in”.
 - e) Henry Ford once said “you can have any color car as long as it is black”. A one size, one color education does not fit all.
 - f) Not all cyber, e-learning schools are the same. Don’t lung all cyber schools into the same basket, some have years of data to base a decision to expanded, eliminated or closed based on QUALITY.
 - g) Define QUALITY – and hold ALL schools to these standards!

Finally, before moving forward ask would you want to force or withhold this learning opportunity for your child/grandchild? -- ultimately, your decision must rest on:

Does this “help our teachers teach and our children learn?”

- Be thoughtful
- Be pioneers – not settlers
- Be bold
- Focus on QUALITY and hold ALL schools and programs to high standards.

In closing I have given the subject of cyber schools, e-learning, personalized learning, virtual schools and other reforms a great deal of thought and have written several article on the topic which I have attached to this testimony.

That concludes my prepared remark and I am happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

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Articles, essays and oped's on e-learning and other reforms, by Tom Watkins

The New Education (R)evolution e-learning for Michigan
www.inacol.org/research/docs/e-learningreport.pdf

Digital-mash-up-of-science-heart-and-mind
<http://educationviews.org/2011/11/17/a-digital-mash-up-of-science-heart-and-mind/>

Michigan and America are in a hole personalized Learning Is the ladder
<http://www.theoaklandpress.com/articles/2011/04/05/opinion/doc4d949d76a9cd2095002181.txt>

Ford's Better Idea...for Our Schools
<http://domemagazine.com/tomwatkins/tw02111>

Making Education Reform Happen
<http://domemagazine.com/tomwatkins/tw0910>

Innovate, Change...or Die
<http://domemagazine.com/tomwatkins/tw040110>

December 6, 2004
Structural Issues Surrounding Michigan School Funding In the 21st Century
michigan.gov/documents/michiganschoolfunding_110803_7.pdf

Come together to fix schools
<http://theoaklandpress.com/articles/2011/05/15/opinion/doc4dcb3ca16975d838357727.txt>

Foundation for the reinvention of Michigan
<http://theoaklandpress.com/articles/2011/05/03/opinion/doc4dc094fc165f8153640728.txt>

Tom Watkins 10 Personal Recommended Action Steps Innovative Learning

May 26, 2011 - by Tom Vander Ark

Tom Watkins was the mental health commissioner in Michigan before becoming school superintendent—he said it was useful preparation for taking over the confusing public delivery ‘system.’ Watkins made Michigan a leader in transparent performance data. Tom continues to push for innovative learning in Michigan and now in China.

Watkins argued that personal digital learning made obsolete the existing confinements of 180 days, 6 hour days, 4 walls of a classroom, and the 2 covers of a textbook. Tom concluded with 10 recommended action steps:

1. Seek incremental as well as revolutionary change.
2. Change state laws that favor building school buildings. Prior to any school being built or a major renovation, a technology impact statement must be developed to demonstrate how technology can reduce/eliminate brick and mortar and advance learning.
3. Develop a strategic plan that asks how schools infrastructure resources and per pupil funding may better be invested in technology and expanding broadband access.
4. Consider eliminating Senior Year “in school.”
5. Beginning in the earliest years make digital, personal e-learning available.
6. Stop restriction on quality personalized learning that protects adults at the expense of kids.
7. Remove academic anchors-allow students to excel at their own pace.
8. Stop arbitrary caps on enrollments and resources.
9. We need to model and lead this change based on data and research.
10. Organize local, state, national, and international personalized learning “Tear Down These Walls” conferences.

I think that's a pretty good list.

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