

The Beaver Island Association

*Supporting Environmental and
Economic Sustainability*

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Saturday, August 18, 2012

To: Kitty McNamara, Jessica Anderson and others who attended the informal session yesterday to review the accuracy and intent of the memo that I read at the public meeting with Mark Eckhardt last Monday, August 13. Attending for the Beaver Island Association board of directors, in addition to me, were Bob Anderson and Jim Jones.

Since the meeting last Monday it is clear that the memo I read has caused great concern amongst many BICS stake holders who felt that the data presented was one-sided, incomplete, and not reflective of the dedication and hard work of the staff, and the progress that BICS students have made over the years.

While the data presented in the August 13 memo included all of the publicly available information regarding student achievement and progress, it is clear from the discussion at yesterday's meeting that the available data, although accurate, does not cover many positive achievements of the students and therefore the faculty and staff. In part this is due to legal requirements protecting the privacy of individual students, which therefore prohibit dissemination of academic performance data for small groups of students, constraining the information that BICS can make public. We accept that the information presented in the memo gave a less than complete view of the achievements of the school and students and for this I apologize. I think in addition, however, it is important for the school administration, parents, students, and the community, that BICS develop a summary reporting system regarding academic performance, so that a clear picture of education results and trends is routinely available to all stakeholders.

The Beaver Island Association is an organization whose mission is to protect our environment so that our island can remain pristine; and to help develop a sustainable and growing economy, both today and for the benefit of future generations. As was said in the August 13 memo, The Beaver Island Community School is essential to achievement of the goals of our mission, and we applaud the dedication and all of the work that has resulted in this beautiful facility and its modern capabilities; further we are pleased that BICS has achieved a high ranking in the summary of all Michigan Public Schools.

At this point I would like to reiterate what the memo of August 13 stated regarding our purpose:

"Our interest in coming here tonight is to urge this selection committee to focus its efforts on retaining an energetic and experienced person to lead the school to high academic achievement. We have a beautiful facility, state of the art classrooms and computer systems, a low student-teacher ratio, and a budget that translates into about \$35 thousand per student per year, or over \$400 thousand investment in a student who matriculates through the K-12 grades. Our students perform very well in social studies and are at least typical of other Michigan students in reading, according to one of the websites. We need the leadership to leverage these resources into stellar academic performance across all the school subjects so they are able to have a range of choices for higher education. While there are many paths to higher education degrees, our students deserve to know that BICS will prepare them so they will be accepted to any school they might choose. Graduating from BICS with strong academic programs will set all our students on a strong path for career and personal fulfillment, which in turn, will benefit the island and its future."

At the meeting on the 13th, other attendees identified a number of important attributes and qualifications desired in the new Superintendent and Principal. These included maintaining a caring environment in the school and increasing the interaction between parents and teachers so that the community is fully involved in the success of all the students. The Beaver Island Association believes that these factors are important and can be helpful in moving the school forward, in so far as they support academic achievement, the ultimate goal.

At Monday's meeting we also discussed the importance of qualifying students for higher education, leading to fulfilling and economically significant jobs. More and more, the economy requires high-level skills in critical thinking, science, technology, engineering and math. Attached to this memo are summaries of recent articles that make this point better than I can.

The Beaver Island Association is a strong supporter of the Beaver Island Community School. A number of our members have contributed meaningfully as volunteers in the school and there is an opportunity and a willingness to do more. As you and others at the Monday meeting pointed out, the school has many strengths, but as the publicly available data show, it also has areas that need improvement. The school should certainly build on its strengths, but it should also address the weaknesses.

I hope we can work together on this.

Sincerely,

Peter Igoe for

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A summary of recent articles regarding the need to enhance the educational system in the United States

- “The entry ticket to the middle class today is a postsecondary education of some kind,” but too many kids are not coming out of K-12 prepared for that, and too many parents don’t understand that, says Jon Schnur, the chairman of America Achieves, which is partnering with the O.E.C.D. Says Schleicher: “If parents do not know, they will not demand, as consumers, a high quality of educational service. They will just say the school my kids are going to is as good as the school I went to.”
- Andreas Schleicher and his team at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development coordinates the Program for International Student Assessment, known as the PISA test. Every three years, the O.E.C.D. has been giving the PISA test to a sample of 15-year-olds, now in 70 countries, to evaluate reading, math and science skills. The U.S. does not stand out. It’s just average, but many parents are sure their kid is above average.
- In his STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education) testimony before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on March 8th 2011, Eric A. Hanushek of Stanford University said: By world standards, our current education system is mediocre. [Our future will be] determined by the skills of American society, and the skills are determined by the quality of our schools. This fact comes through clearly when we look at differences over the past half century in long run growth rates for countries around the world. Countries that have developed more skills in their population systematically have grown faster. The potential differences in the future of the United States economy are dramatic. These gains are equivalent to a level of GDP that on average is 6-10 percent higher every year for the next 80 years. This eliminates the currently projected fiscal imbalances and leaves plenty to spare. My message is simple. The gains from improving [STEM in] our schools – or the costs of not doing so – are enormous.”
- In a New York Times article of on August 7, 2012, Thomas Freidman argues that average is all over for education: “For politicians, it’s all about “made in America,” but, for companies, it is increasingly about “made in the world.” The credo of successful businesses today is: “You only hire someone — anywhere — if you absolutely have to,” if a smarter machine, robot or computer program is not available.”
- In an August 15, 2012 article in Cranes Detroit Business it was reported that Michigan is begging for \$100,000 engineers after auto industry rebound. Michigan's unemployment was the worst in the U.S. at 14.2 percent in August 2009, shortly after General Motors Co. and Chrysler Group LLC emerged from a U.S.-backed rescue. That rate has since plunged to 8.6 percent, roughly in line with the national average. Employment in skilled positions is rising, reversing a decline under way since the turn of the century. Demand for engineering and IT workers is requiring additional pay and bonuses, with the normal pay range of \$80,000 to \$120,000 commonly stretching toward the high end. A recent recruit got a \$17,000 raise and bonus of as much as 20 percent to move from Tennessee to Michigan, he said. Engineers who design cars and parts and need specific — and, in some cases, advanced — degrees, have been in demand throughout the U.S. for years. Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said part of the problem has been a gap between what companies need and what the educational system produces.