

Issues Are Addressed At Field Advisory Council Meeting

School violence, school funding, changing demographics and the threat of terrorism were addressed in a panel discussion by school administrators during the School of Education's Field Advisory Council meeting in March.

Held at the Eberhard Center, the discussion was moderated by television news anchor Suzanne Geha of WOOD TV-8.

The panel consisted of Charles Sturdivant of Grand Rapids Public Schools, Forest Hills Superintendent Dr. Michael Washburn, Washington Elementary principal Mary Garcia and Allendale Schools Superintendent Catherine Ceglarek.

"Teacher candidates are coming in better prepared," Washburn said. "There are more mentorships, and the collaboration between younger teachers and senior teachers continues to grow stronger."

Panelists discussed population diversity shifts and dealing with changing socio-economic issues.

Sensitivity issues, inclusion of an array of differing cultural backgrounds, handicapped accessibility and meeting the needs of second language students are all priorities of school administrators.

Grand Rapids, for instance, has students in the district speaking over 25 different languages, according to Sturdivant.

At Allendale, budget cuts have forced the elimination of non-essential or non-self funding field trips, cutbacks of staff, summer school, adult education, pre-school programs and transportation.

"It's a painful process, but we have to meet budgets," Ceglarek said.

The Grand Rapids district, meanwhile, has been dealing with funding issues for many years.



"We're trying to stay as far away from classrooms as possible with our cuts," Sturdivant said, alluding to reductions in central office, maintenance and special education staff.

The Proposal A funding source — where a majority of education funding relies on increased taxation on goods and services — has not been able to keep up with school funding demands, according to one panel member.

"Proposal A does not work when the economy is hurting, because there are not enough sales to support it," Garcia said. "We need to get more money coming back to school districts and other options more desirable than millages through property taxes."

The administrators agreed that President Bush's No Child Left Behind program is a worthy ideal, but standardized testing needs to be revamped to be fair and accommodate all students being tested.

"What needs to be changed through the next decade is focusing on K-12 reading and writing,



School of Education interim dean Dr. Anne Mulder, top, introduces a panel discussion among West Michigan school administrators, while breakout presentations, below, provide additional insights.

focusing on good instructors and looking at smaller schools and relationship-based education with start times, end times and career pathways," Washburn said.

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