

INAUGURAL COLUMN

School News Network is your window into public education. It's the sights, the sounds, the stories of students, teachers, the arts, sports and everything else that goes on in your schools.

That's right. *Your* schools. What happens in your schools is vitally important to you, to your community and to your future – and the future of the thousands of children who attend them daily.

There are 20 school districts serving the more than 100,000 school-age children in the greater Grand Rapids area. You're probably most informed, and involved, with the one that serves your community. That's as it should be. But we believe you deserve to know what's going on in all the area's schools, because our region depends on their ability to create an educated citizenry and a skilled workforce.

Why School News Network?

Schools needed a better way to tell their story in a way the traditional media cannot. That's not in any way a criticism of traditional media, it's simply a fact. The traditional media do not have the resources or the physical space to cover any aspect of their community as completely as we hope to cover your schools. One influential media decision maker said it like this when asked by a local superintendent why his media outlet didn't pay more attention to the "good" news in education.

"Scores of planes take off and land at the Ford International Airport every day," he said. "That is what people expect, and it's not news. News is when the airplane skids off the runway or, worse, crashes." While that may be an acceptable rationale for media coverage of the comings and goings at the state's second largest airport, we believe what happens in your schools deserves more attention.

We see your schools as the lynchpin of our democracy, the place where we level the playing field between the rich and the poor to prepare all for full participation in society. For too long it has been covered as though it were the airport, with little to no attention paid to the many successes of our system and far too much focused on the problems, many of which are more reflective of the community served by the school than they are the school itself. Indeed, recent reports by think tanks as disparate as the progressive Center for American Progress and Michigan's conservative Mackinac Center indicate many schools criticized as "failing" are actually outperforming their peers when student achievement results are adjusted for poverty.

Join us!

Bookmark School News Network. Read the human interest stories of highly respected columnist Tom Rademacher and reporters Erin Albanese, Nardy Bickel and Charles Honey. You'll laugh, you'll cry, and you'll be inspired by the devotion of teachers and the achievement of their students.