

# State weighs new special ed rules

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

For 10 years, Pat Stacey has taught special education. Despite a master's degree in learning disabilities, proposed state rules could require the University of Michigan teacher to take 30 more college credits costing \$3,000 in order to keep her job.

"This is overwhelming and unfair," Stacey told state Board of Education members during a past public hearing Monday in Oakland County, Pontiac. "Universities are in desperate need of students and are going to tell you it's more complicated than it is. But special education teaching is just good teaching."

MORE THAN 500 people attended the last of six public hearings on proposed changes in Michigan's special education rules. The eight-hour session wrapped up two weeks of well-attended hearings in East Lansing, Kalamazoo, Wayne, Traverse City and Marquette.

While more than 200 were present at East Lansing and Wayne Intermediate Schools, Oakland's was the largest and longest gathering. One-hundred-twenty people spoke at the session, which started at 4 p.m. and ended after midnight.

"We expected an overwhelming response," said Carol Gardner, director of special education for Oakland Intermediate School District which serves all local districts.

"There is concern about the potential effect on youngsters as well as increased program costs."

THE STATE Board of Education is considering revising 62 special education administrative rules and eliminating five.

In addition, a dozen new rules are being proposed, including proposals for resource rooms to serve students who need to be in special education all day or less, revisions in procedures for due process hearings and investigations of parent complaints.

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changes in qualifications of special education personnel and revisions in teacher-student ratios.

The rule changes would take place Sept. 1. Several of those addressing the public hearing requested they be put off for another year.

Representatives of several districts expressed concern about the cost of implementing some of the changes.

"It's a Catch 22," said Katherine Elliott, a Birmingham resident who represented the Special Education Administrators of Oakland County. She said lowering case loads for speech and language teachers will cost the district she teaches in \$250,000.

"There are rules we support on principle, but know districts can't afford. So we'd like to see an increase in funds available through the State Aid Act."

WHILE THERE are many proposed changes, concern is focused on a half-dozen major issues.

While many districts have "resource rooms" they are not included in the state's present special education regulations. The new rules would set up a structure for the programs serving youth who can go back and forth between special education and general education classrooms.

There is widespread concern that giving "resource rooms" official approval would mean hiring more aides for the programs and upgrading teachers who would be required to have cer-

tification in two instead of one special education area.

ALSO ATTRACTING a lot of attention is a proposal allowing districts to mix students now either in a severely mentally impaired program or severely multiply impaired program, which includes mental and physical handicaps.

Benson Herbert, superintendent of Regional Planning and Compliance for Michigan's Department of Education, believes much of the controversy stems from concern that the resource rooms and new severely impaired program would be required.

"Under the old rules, there wasn't much flexibility to move kids," he explained. "We're not doing away with those programs, just allowing more options."

Gardner said many parents are worried about the effect of consolidating programs. "They are concerned that their youngsters might not receive as much attention under the new program."

OTHER ISSUES discussed include: Teacher training requirements which could mean more education for present special education teachers. "It's safe to say some people will be going back to school," said Herbert.

Intermediate school districts would present three-year plans for special education instead of the present one year plans. Aiming at more long-

range planning, the change would conform to the three-year state plan required by the federal government.

Complaints about services would go immediately to the state Department of Education, which would clarify which rule pertains to it. Then the district would investigate the charge. State officials contend there is "inconsistency" in the present system of letting local districts determine which rule applies and handling complaints on their own.

Speech and language therapists' caseloads would be reduced from 75 students to 50 students.

Now monitored by their intermediate districts every year to see if they're in compliance, local school districts would also be evaluated. Possible changes would be suggested.

SEVERAL TEACHERS expressed concern about requirements for existing teachers being upped. Most suggested a "grandfathering" clause protecting those already in the field from the rules. Otherwise, there is concern many teachers will leave special education for general education classrooms.

Michael Dombrowski, director of special services for Claremont Schools, said he'd like to see increased education for new teachers. "There are gaps out there and programming is moving along at a fast rate. But you can't outdo past experience," he explained, asking also that the changes be delayed until fall, 1986.

"A teacher with past experience working in a resource room with kids should be grandfathered in."

Speaking on behalf of the Association for Retarded Citizens of Michigan, speech and language pathologist Patricia Mullen said parents were not adequately informed about the hearings.

"I submit that the reason parent turnout at the hearings is low is because parents don't know," she said.

"I'm for quality. Ladies and gentlemen of the state Department of Education, we will be watching you."



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Clearing of snow and ice from residential subdivision streets in township areas of Oakland County has been delayed by the need to keep Road Commission trucks on main traveled routes.

"It may be several days before we are able to divert snow plows to subdivision streets," said John L. Grubbs, managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission.

"Due to the sustained snow and icing conditions since midday Sunday, Feb. 10, it has been necessary to keep trucks on main routes around the clock. We have never been able to staff or equip to clear the more than 2,400 miles of Oakland County roads on the same priority," he said.

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