

Aid to schools up 5.5% in Blanchard budget

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Two suburban state senators still are puzzled by what Gov. James J. Blanchard means by a 5.5 percent proposed increase in state school aid.

"My concern," said Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, "is that 90 percent of the schools in my district are 'out of formula'—governmental jargon meaning they get no state aid. Thus, a 5.5 percent increase in nothing is still nothing."

It (the increase) could go to the base (the school aid)," said Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, "or it could go to categorical aid (special ed, transportation and vocational), which would help out-of-formula districts."

Faxon and Geake are members of the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, which will wrestle with Blanchard's \$5.991 billion, "out-of-the-line" election-year budget.

THE GOVERNOR, due to be out of

the state next week when his budget message is due, gave the capital news corps a broad-brush outline of his priorities in a half-hour briefing Wednesday.

Even though asking \$11 million less than the state spent last year, Blanchard asked 5.5 percent more for all education, from kindergarten through universities; 9.4 percent more for prisons; and unspecified increases for job training, student assistance and natural resources protection.

He boasted that "the state's ratio of education funding to overall budget has increased by 15 percent" during his administration, which began in 1983.

The savings will come from a lower welfare budget due to a falling caseload, lower capital outlay spending and reduced debt services costs, now that Michigan's \$1.7 billion recession debt has been paid off.

SIMULTANEOUSLY, Agnes M. Mansour, director of the Department of Social Services, announced the welfare

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caseload actually increased in December, but called it an "anticipated seasonal" increase. It was the first increase since February of 1985, she said. The details:

- ADC — aid to dependent children — rose 1,759 cases (0.8 percent) to 220,260 cases.
- ADC-U (unemployed) accounted for 570 of those (2.2 percent), for a total of 31,600.
- GA — general assistance, mainly for single males — rose by 540 cases (0.5 percent) to 119,150.

GEAKE, THE only legislator to attend Blanchard's news conference, spotted an apparent contradiction in Blanchard's economic forecast.

"He's depending on a drop in the number of people on welfare (to boost school and prison spending). But his forecast of economic growth is limited," said Geake, noting the governor predicted only "modest" growth.

Geake, whose district includes Livonia, Plymouth-Canton and Redford, said, "Those of us who represent high-valuation districts will want to see 'out-of-formula' districts get their fair share."

Faxon, the Senate's acknowledged expert on school-aid formulas, said he encouraged the governor to adjust the formulas so that Birmingham, Southfield and Farmington public schools would get more categorical aid.

BLANCHARD DODGED questions about whether he would use his line-item veto to hold spending in place, preferring to call the Legislature "extremely cooperative." Acknowledging Geake's presence, he said, "You've certainly been helpful."

The governor added, "We've made a major investment in education. . . . I'm sure, not the level they (educators) would like. It's the equivalent of six miles locally. It's taken the pressure off the property tax burden."

Repeatedly, Blanchard ripped federal deficits, producing charts to show Washington's accumulated debt hit the \$2 billion mark about the same time he was proclaiming Michigan "Solventy Day."

"If there is an overriding story about the federal budget as compared to state budgets," he said, "it is that states have taken the time to get their financial houses in order during the recovery, and the federal government has done just the opposite. The federal government is in serious financial trouble."

Geake shrugged that off as political rhetoric "to undermine Republican comments that Michigan is doing well by the U.S. economy is doing well."

ACTUAL SPENDING numbers will be unveiled next week by budget director Robert Naftaly, the former West Bloomfield accountant who has headed that office for the past two years.

Those numbers will include recommendations for 11 four-year colleges and 59 community colleges, who individually may or may not get exactly 5.5 percent more apiece.

Asked if he would acquiesce to more brick-and-mortar for higher education if the economy does better than expected and revenues are high, Blanchard warned:

"They (legislators) will have the money spent before I acknowledge it's there. That policy is what gave Michigan its bankruptcy days. That mentality led to the federal debt."

State support of schools up

According to state officials state support of local school districts, per pupil, has risen steadily over the last several years. The per-pupil amounts for each fiscal year since 1981 are as follows:

Fiscal year	Aid
1981	\$710
1982	\$673
1983	\$688
1984	\$633
1985	\$670
1986	\$1,095
1987	\$1,168

The budget year begins next Oct. 1. Blanchard based revenue predictions on the state's returning to its pre-recession 4.6 percent personal income tax rate.

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County road commission again headed by Gnau

John R. Gnau Jr. of Bloomfield Township will continue as chairman of the Board of Oakland County Road Commissioners in 1986.

Gnau was selected by his two board colleagues to another one-year term. Richard V. Vogt of Waterford Township will continue as vice chairman. Fred D. Houghton of Rochester Hills is the third member.

Members are appointed to six-year terms by Oakland County Board of Commissioners, which also set their salaries. Road commissioners are paid \$7,500 annually for part-time, policy-making duties. The chairman is paid an additional \$1,000 a year.

Gnau, 55, served as chairman in 1985 and in 1983, 1977 and 1976. Gnau is currently serving the final year of his second six-year term.

He previously served as an elected Bloomfield Township trustee.

Vogt, 55, is employed in cost accounting with General Dynamics Corporation's Land Systems Division in Warren.

Houghton, 65, is currently serving the fourth year of his second six-year term. He is a former county commissioner and board chairman.



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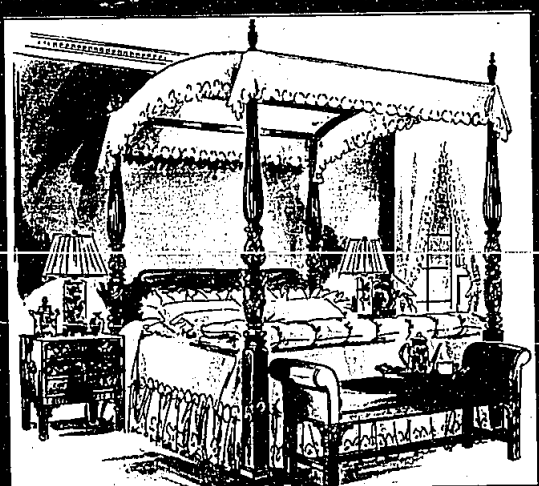
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