New special ed rules to allow smaller classes

How revised special ed rules affect Oakland schools

New special education rules, which salled through the State Board of Edu-cation last week, are "designed to last into the next century," in the words of one administrator.

into the next century." In the words of one administrator.

The end of a two-year working process was a unanimous voice vote by the state's highest elected policy board.

Board members raised only two questions — about a possible six-year age range in special ed classes and about higher costs due to smaller teacher loads.

They recomed satisfied the rules

acher loads.

They seemed satisfied the rules on't hurt Michigan's 160,000 special

"THE CURRENT special education rules were passed in 1973, when special ed was a new mandate," said Dr.Ed-ward Birch, state director of special

"Over the last 13 or 14 years, we've seen drastic changes," Birch said, cit-

separate rooms are now "main-streamed as much as possible. Half of our kids in special ed spend less than half their time in special ed class-

DOROTHY BEARDMORE, a new state board member who served on both the Rochester and Oakland Intermediate boards, won approval for her request for a periodic review of the rule allowing children from as many as six elementary grades to be taught in a single "resource room".

That change had stirred concern and some opposition from Oakland County parents. The current rule is four years. The change was made, Birch said, because "you'd need two classrooms in every building to have a four-year span." DOROTHY BEARDMORE, a new

Of the state's 124 special education rules, exactly half were revised by the State Board of Education. Dr. Richard Baldwin, polley development specialist, add only 17 would have any cost impact. Here are the four major cost changes and how they would affect Oakland Intermediate and local school districts.

Severely mentally impaired — Current rule allows a maximum of one teacher, four instructional aides and 24 students.

In a real life situation dealing, for example, with math, he added, it's unlikely lirst and sixth graders ever would be mixed. And the mixing would occur only with mild cases.

He called fears of inappropriate mixes "a worst case scenario."

HOW LOCAL and intermediate school districts will pay for the changes — many of which reduce class and teaching loads — bothered two board

members.
"What I hear from the local districts is, "Where will the money come from?" said Cherry Jacobus of East

rom?" said Cherry Jacobus of East Grand Rapids.
Dr. Phillip E. Runkel, state superintendent of public instruction, said the "worst secarelo" would cause 33 million of increases — less than 1 percent of the \$500 million spent satiewide on special education. See separate story on this page.

Those cost increases would be offset by efficiencies and reductions in other areas, although no dollar amount could be put on the savings, Runkel and Birch said.
"It's pretty much a wash," Birch

The change sets a ratio of either a) one teacher, two aides and 12 students or b) a ratio of one teacher, three aides and 15 students. Statewide, the cost increase will be \$815,000 for 23 districts.

In Oakland County, Bloomfield Hills would have to add one teacher and one aide for a total of \$36,000; Pontiac the same; and Farmington, two teachers for a total of \$52,000.

• Educable mentally impaired — Present rule sets a teacher's caseload at 18 students.

fect.
Next, said Runkel, the rules must be reviewed for form by the attorney general's staff. Then they go to the Legislature's Joint Administrative Rules Committee.

"The rules committee can't amend them," Runkel said. "It can reject them. It can send them back and tell you what parts they don't like. The

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RUNKEL SAID some rules could be implemented as early as next fall.

Birch advised districts not to make changes, however, until they are in ef-

The new rule reduces the caseload to 15 at the elementary level and requires an aide whenever the teacher has 12 or more students in the classroom at one time. Total cost statewide is projected at \$1.5 million.

Rural districts with high caseloads cerned most affected. Oakland is

Physicially and otherwise health impaired — Current rule sets a maxi-mum of 15 full-time equivalent stu-dents for each teacher.

BEARDMORE SAID the state board passed emergency rules during the 1979-83 fiscal crisis. "Our experience showed, hey, some

The new rule sets maximums of a) 15 different students and b) no more than 10 at a time. Total statewide cost to 13 intermediate districts would be \$373,000.
Oskland Intermediate would have to add a single staff member at a cost of \$44,000.
• Speech and language impaired—Current rule sets a maximum caseload of 75 pupils. New rule cuts sits to 60. Total state cost is estimated at \$189,000.
Oakland, with an average caseload

Oakland, with an average caseload of 36, is unaffected.

committee will have a hearing on this.
"The State Board of Education has final approval," he said.

were good. But there was no way the board could make those temporary rules permanent," she said.

Current rules have been marked by many requests for "hundreds of deviations," she said. "With the new rules, we expect there will be fewer requests, and fewer will be granted."

The two-year process was marked by many suggestions, negoliations and group compromises. In the final month, as in the final month of the final month

THE OAKLAND Parents Advisory Notice was angry they weren't committee was angreed to the committee of the committee of the committee was a committee of the committ

"I've met with individual special ed teachers, and they say it's wonderful. There might have been a few concerns, but a lot of the fears have been built on worse possible cases.
"The complaint procedures have been improved."

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"It's pretty much a wash," Birch

His appointment was announced by Joe Knollenberg, county chair-

man.
Schellenberg is a member of the
Republican Leadership committee
and county finance committee. He
most recently was recruitment coordinator. He is president of Schellen-P.C. a tax and bust-

GOP picks finance chairman

Thomas L. Schellenberg, a Bir-mingham attorney and certified pub-lic accountant, is the new finance chalrman of the Oakland County Re-publican Committee.

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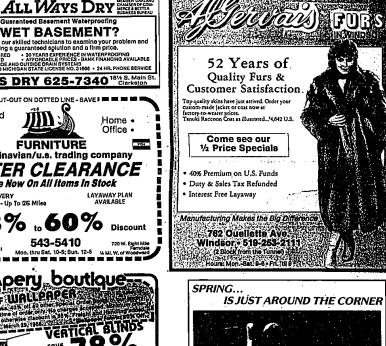
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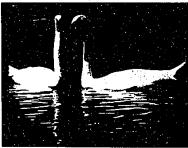
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