

State eyes lifting licenses of dropouts

High school dropouts would have their driver's licenses suspended if the Legislature passes bills supported by the Michigan Association of High School Principals.

Truants and youngsters expelled from school for 15 days also would lose driving privileges.

Locally, educators are lukewarm about the proposal, saying it would not really keep many students in school and unfairly penalize those few suburban students who do drop out.

"I guess I wouldn't say that it should be completely taken away," said Barbara Stock, assistant principal at West Bloomfield High. She favors the proposal, but a restricted license instead.

In House testimony about the bill, Principal Keith Wing of St. Louis High School said, "Young people value the right to drive an auto. They believe they are independent of authority."

"School is an exciting place to be. I'm 52 years old, and I can't wait to get there in the morning," said Wing.

arguing that alternative programs and vocational courses could grab kids' attention.

Adrian High Principal Jerry Burg said, "Dropouts are not thinking through their decision. They are impulsive. The driver's license may be the key to keeping students in school."

MEMBERS OF the House Education Committee were skeptical, even after a solid hour of recent testimony.

The hearing occurred a day before the federal government reported Michigan's high school graduation rate had dropped to 62 percent — 48th in the nation, ahead of only the District of Columbia, Florida and Louisiana.

Under House Bills 4234 and 4236, superintendents of public and private secondary schools would be required to report names of dropouts, truants and expelled students to the Secretary of State, who could suspend their driving privileges.

Sponsors are Reps. Philip Hoff-

man, R-Horton, and Claude Trim, R-Waterford.

The 15-member panel, chaired by Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City, will study them further before deciding whether to report them to the House floor.

"We don't have very many students that drop out," said James Stone, counselor at Birmingham's Groves High School. "The few that do drop out go to work. For them it would defeat the purpose of what we're trying to accomplish, which is to make them productive members of society."

"I don't think it would keep kids in school," he continued. "A car is awfully important to kids, but it won't keep them in school. It's a punitive type of action."

"What if a student dropped out for a good reason and needed the auto to support the family?" asked Rep. Robert DeMars, D-Lincoln Park.

Burg said most new jobs in an increasingly technical society will require high school and even college degrees. "That two-year period, 16

to 18, is critical. If we can keep them coming in the door, we have a chance."

"In drivers' ed, we don't keep attendance. They're there. I have students failing basic English who pass the drivers' ed test," Burg said.

"IT'S IRONIC," said Rep. Nelson Saunders, D-Detroit, "that the state says you can drop out at 16 and then (would) take away your driver's license. Many make a conscious decision they can't survive in that (school) environment."

Burg replied: "The law says we can't prosecute parents for not sending students to school after age 16."

"The purpose is inaudible," said Rep. Gary Randall, R-Elwell. "But it's a radical departure."

SEVERAL MEMBERS said students might turn surly if forced to return to school in order to drive legally.

"Do you want someone in your class whose only purpose is to keep a driver's license?" asked Rep. James

Kosteva, D-Canton.

"All you're doing," said Officer John Himmelspach, police liaison at West Bloomfield High, "is forcing them to be in our building and, if he's disruptive it's harmful for education."

"What if you had expelled them as incorrigible?" asked Rep. Nate Jonker, D-Clio.

"At Adrian, we've had only one expulsion in 10 years in a town of 25,000," replied Burg.

"You've done great things with dropouts," said Rep. Tim Walberg, R-Tipton. "But this seems to keep students in school just to keep them in school. Some achieve super things without a high school diploma."

"It's rare to achieve success without education," said Burg.

"WE'RE GOING to have a lot more discussion," promised chairman Keith, who visited schools in Japan and Korea in 1988 and returned from Germany last month.

"In Japan, they have less than a 2 percent dropout rate. They have 240 days of school a year and go on Saturdays."

"They keep their children until they graduate. They (children) are not allowed to hold a job. They're not allowed to drive. It is a great family disgrace to drop out."

"On the other side, they have a tremendous mass transit program in Japan."

Staff writers Tim Richard and Dave Varga contributed to this report.

Oakland gets most of road funds

Oakland County's roads will get more than half of the money Michigan has issued for road improvements to keep up with economic development.

Michigan gave out \$56.5 million statewide Friday, with Oakland County communities getting nearly \$50.5 million to build up their roads to keep up with planned business and industry growth.

The money comes out of the Transportation Economic Development Fund created in 1987 and first issued last year as part of a strategy to spur economic growth by improv-

ing the state transportation system. It is funded by driver license and vehicle registration fees.

THE ROAD work is designed to support private investment by Michigan business and industry, which will total more than \$2 billion and create more than 30,000 jobs across the state, according to Gov. James Blanchard.

Major projects in Oakland County include \$21.9 million for highways and roads serving the new Chrysler Tech Center in Auburn Hills, another \$3.22 million toward the cost of re-

constructing a section of 12 Mile Road as a boulevard for office center development in Farmington Hills and \$9.8 million for roads serving Northfield Hills Corp. Center in Troy.

Although he wasn't aware of any grants going to the Oakland County Road Commission, spokesman John

Joy said, "Anytime anybody improves any road anywhere (in Oakland County) everybody wins."

Joy said he wasn't surprised Oakland County got most of the state funds. "We're the most economically developing county," he said.

By comparison, Wayne County won \$13 million in grants.

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