

Capitalizing on education

Parents take school finance complaints to Lansing

By Casey Hana
staff writer

GOV. JOHN ENGLER got one. So did Rep. James O'Neill, Sen. Dan Degrow and numerous other Lansing legislators, as a Farmington-area parent group got tough Wednesday and took their case for school finance reform to the state capital.

They carried with them sets of petitions listing the signatures of 5,000 people upset with state school funding cuts.

Though most legislators told them that districts like Farmington will likely face more cuts this year, the group's three organizers said they are still determined to have a voice in any finance changes.

"They need to see how much they've hurt us," Lukasiak said. "Our government is going to have to put education on top of the priority list."

"Our purpose is not to just recoup our losses, we're looking for a solution to the big picture. We'd like legislators to do their homework on this."

The culmination of several months' work by the group ended in the petition delivery Wednesday. The group began collecting signatures last fall, prompted by the loss of \$5.8 million to Farmington Public



Debbie Lukasiak (left), Kerry Kelly and Jan Bennett talk with state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, who voted against the state funding cuts last summer. He encouraged the

group to start a statewide petition drive to amend the Constitution so that no more money can be taken from local schools.

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On Feb. 5, the district was turned down when it approached voters to

replace the lost money with local property taxes. "Because we lost the millage, this is a really good time for parents to see that somebody's doing something," Bennett said.

THIS GROUP scheduled meetings with legislators who sit on committees or subcommittees instrumental in debating and passing legislation affecting schools. Most told the parents that Farmington and other districts will see more cuts come July 1 — something Farmington school superintendent Michael Flanagan has predicted since last summer's cuts.

"We have a horrible equity problem," Sen. John Schwartz, R-Battle Creek, who sits on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for school aid, told the parents. "As a practical matter, you're going to get hit again with recapture in '91-'92."

DeGrow, a Republican from Port Huron who chairs the same committee, said he believes Engler and the legislature will make education a priority. But the only viable option for changing school financing, he said, is a tax-base sharing approach which would likely involve capturing increases in commercial property tax assessments to redistribute for education.

DeGrow said other options, like a sales tax increase, just won't be accepted by the public.

SAGINAW DEMOCRAT O'Neill, who chairs the same subcommittee

for the House, told the parents he empathized but agreed with DeGrow, and said the legislature must "do something fast before the courts do."

"There will probably be an attempt to look at (school employee) retirement" which is now paid by the state, he said. "We'll probably take a whack at it. And there will probably be more recapture."

The parents said tax-base sharing and recapture represent evils for Farmington and other out-of-formula districts which get most of their money from local property taxes.

"What do you want to do about yourself or drown?" asked Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, who has opposed the state recapture which has hurt schools in the district. Faxon advocates a Constitutional amendment that would forbid the state from taking any more money. He suggested the residents make their petition drive statewide, and legal.

"Giving these (petitions) to me is like helping the Pope become Catholic," he said.

THE PARENT group stressed it does not want to ignore the needs of in-formula districts, which rely on state funding for the bulk of their money. "We do not ignore or take lightly, the in-formula schools' needs," they said in a prepared statement.



DANIEL LIPPIT/staff photographer

State Rep. James O'Neill, D-Saginaw, who chairs the House Appropriations Subcommittee for school aid and education, talks with the Farmington parents, pledging to get involved in community meetings in Oakland County on education reform. In front of O'Neill are copies of petitions with 5,000 signatures carried to Lansing by the Farmington contingent.

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Bring in x-rays of your joints if you had them taken within a year of the present appointment. X-rays older than six months may not have a second chance, but current pictures save return visits and duplication of costs.

If you were under the care of another doctor for your arthritis, bring a copy of his recent notes on your case. All about your arthritis history, including the current notes will give your present physician an impression of a previous diagnosis and past therapy.

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Hills assessment notices hit homes

Continued from Page 1

made by March 13. Call the assessor's office for an appointment, 473-9584.

IF NECESSARY, board of review dates can be extended to accommodate property owners' appeals. In 1990, the board heard 1,400 appeals. "Everything in my guts indicates I shouldn't have that many this year," Babb said.

Babb encourages appeals by letter. A "good letter" appeal, for example, is if someone just bought a house and the assessment is more than what was paid. "They can write a letter and send a copy of the deed," Babb said.

Property owners who plan to appeal assessments based on hardship should call the assessor's office for a hardship form.

Commercial property assessments have increased an average 2 percent and industrial on average 3 percent. In 1990, both types of property increased an average 3 percent.

For assessment purposes, Babb used a 24-month study of sales, which includes the last nine months of 1988, all of 1989 and the first three months of 1990. Babb said he also paid attention to the housing sales market, which has slowed down.

"Assessments take time to catch up to the market. We do that to protect homeowners in high-inflation times," he added.

Houses are on the market longer but prices are pretty much higher than they were before. In the \$100,000-\$160,000 market, prices are still going up. The same goes for houses in the \$40,000-\$80,000 range. But prices of houses in the more than \$300,000 range "are flat at best," Babb said.

The assessment process determines the true cash value of properties for the purpose of calculating property taxes. City, school and county tax rates are levied against the assessed value of property. An assessment is generally 50 percent of the "usual selling price" of a house.

2 guilty of killing teacher

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Johnson's defense attorney, Maria Mannarino, contended prosecutors and police were pressured to solve the case because Poux was a good friend of Wayne County assistant prosecutor George Ward.

"There are certain pressures felt by police," she added.



Andre Poux

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