

Lawmakers jockeying on tax base sharing

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Suburban school districts in 1993 would get back \$74 million in categorical aid that the state took away last year — for a price.

The price would be property tax base sharing, under an aid bill drafted by the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on school aid.

"It would mainly affect districts with cornfields zoned commercial," said Rick Simonson, legislative agent for Oakland Intermediate School District.

Simonson identified Oxford and Novi as the two Oakland districts most likely to be affected by the tax base sharing plan.

Intently watching Tuesday's 15-minute meeting was a group of Birmingham high school students studying funding equity for Michigan schools.

TAX BASE sharing is the pet project of Sen. Dan DeGrow, R-Port Huron, chair of the Senate panel on school funding.

Under it, half of all growth in commercial and industrial property would be collected in common and distributed to all districts on a per-pupil basis.

Option I calls for statewide sharing. Option II calls for multi-county regions.

Under Option II, Wayne, Washtenaw and 11 southernmost counties would be a region. Oakland, Livingston and the middle 23 counties north to Clare would be a second region. A third region would be the Thumb, the northern lower peninsula and the upper peninsula.

Business tax base sharing would have little effect on largely residential districts like Bloomfield Hills or built-up districts like Southfield, South Redford and Livonia.

In return, out-of-formula districts, which get no general state aid, would see the return of \$72 million in categorical aid — for special education, bilingual teaching, health and other specific programs. That money was "recaptured" — legislative jargon for taken away — in the 1991 school aid bill. Some 51 districts are suing in the state Court of Appeals.

DeGROW PLACED money, for several other favorite projects of his and Gov. John Engler's in the \$3.5 billion budget bill.

• \$1 million for transportation for schools of choice programs. The plan would allow parents to enroll their children in any available school. Part of the money would be for in-district choice; part for cross-

district choice within a county.

• \$300,000 for 12 pilot programs for 200-day school years. Current state law requires at least 180 days of school, and most districts provide only the minimum.

• No cap on state Social Security payments for teachers — another pet topic among suburban districts.

DeGrow said his panel would act on the measure, House Bill 4572, next Tuesday, sending it to the full Appropriations Committee for action Wednesday. Meanwhile, the House was to vote on its version this week.

Gov. Engler recommended \$3.55 billion, up 4.7 percent over the current year's \$3.4 billion. The House panel raised the ante to \$3.6 billion.

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— Katie Weaver
Birmingham Seaholm sophomore

The Senate version asks \$3.56 billion, up 5 percent over the current year.

MATT McASKIN, a Birmingham Seaholm High student, said students there took up the school money issue after Gov. Engler spoke to them May 8.

"We collected 1,500 petition signatures," he said. The petition supports equity between school districts but says quality need not be sacrificed in one district to improve others.

Nothing some districts have as little as \$2,500 per student while Birmingham has \$7,500 and Southfield \$8,000, he said his group "wants them to meet at the top, not in the middle."

"Our purpose," added 10th grader-

Katie Weaver, "is not for us as individuals. We'll be graduating. We won't be hurt. We want to help our younger brothers and sisters and students in other districts. We've had 11 years of exemplary education."

The student group is called AP-LE — for Advocates of Positive Policies for Legislative Education.

John Hoefler, Birmingham's incoming superintendent who accompanied the group, said the 1991 "recapture" provision will cost his district 30 positions.

Students were disappointed the Senate subcommittee session was so brief and that no testimony was taken.

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Voc-tech set for review

Two key Democrats in Lansing will lead a "Speaker's Blue Ribbon Commission on Career/Technical Education."

House Speaker Lewis Dodak of Birch Run and Education Committee chair William Keith of Garden City want the 12-member panel to evaluate vocational programs so that high school graduates have job skills.

"It is vital," said Keith, "that educators work closely with business and labor interests to identify the kind of career and technical training that will be needed."

Named to the panel was Philip Power, chair of Suburban Communications Corp., parent of Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and a University of Michigan regent.

DODAK AND Keith are the only two lawmaker members. Dodak will chair the group, and Keith will be vice chair, they said during a news conference Tuesday.

Education members include Geneva Titsworth, former Eastern Michigan University regent; Leta Jackson, director of voc ed for the state Department of Education; Betty Ong, vocational teacher from Royal Oak; and Clyde LeTarte, president of Jackson Community College.

Others are Dennis Brieske, director of the Saginaw-Midland-Bay area training consortium; Bergit Klohs of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce; Jeff Hearn, vice president of Champion International Inc.; Dr. Renee Lerche, manager of education planning for Ford Motor Co.; Sharon Roy, member of the National Federation of Independent Businesses; and Bruce Stine, state AFL-CIO human resources director.

KEITH, a former member of the Garden City school board, said the panel will:

• Analyze the effectiveness of present voc-tech programs.

• Recommend expansion and improvement of vocational programs for non-college bound students.

• Examine business' role in helping schools restructure existing programs to meet the needs of business.

• Recommend ways to help students make a "seamless transition" from school to the workforce.

"It is clear many students graduating from high school do not possess the skills they will need in the workplaces of the '90s," said Dodak.