

Lawmakers give Engler school plan mixed reviews

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Everyone saw something different to applaud or criticize in Gov. John Engler's "Michigan 2000" plan for achieving excellence in the \$8 billion public school system.

"It is a plan that gives people — parents, students and educators — the freedom, the power and the options to achieve excellence," the Republican governor told the Legislature and State Board of Education Wednesday.

Engler's most-used words: "teachers" and "parents." His least used:

"administrators."

DOROTHY BEARDMORE, R-Rochester, president of the State Board of Education, "liked his focus on parenting" and "the recognition that children need to be ready for school." She praised Engler's emphasis on teacher development and tenure reform.

Annetta Miller, D-Huntington Woods, a past member of the State Board, found nothing new. "I'm personally not sure the 'charter school' can work," she said of Engler's plan, borrowed from Minnesota, to let local school boards grant charters to a

certified faculty that would determine curriculum.

Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, liked tutoring for at-risk kids in early grades and extended kindergarten hours. "They need to read before they leave the primary grades. But I'm still concerned about how we're going to pay for it."

"I agree 100 percent with his emphasis on parents and teachers," said Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-West Bloomfield.

"I liked his emphasis on early education. That's my bias," said Sen. Mat Dunaskis, R-Lake Orion, a former elementary teacher. "This is

very, very do-able."

ENGLER'S EMPHASIS on new kinds of publicly funded, competitive schools was criticized by Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills. He called charter schools and federally funded "new American schools" just "a proliferation and expansion of an already inefficient system."

He blasted Engler's failure to advocate consolidation of the smaller of Michigan's 562 districts.

But Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville, said charter schools "are probably the most dramatic idea and could do a lot for low-income areas

of the state, though they wouldn't do much for western Wayne County."

Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City and House Education Committee chairman, was "delighted" with the governor's emphasis on education but didn't see much new. "What he's proposing is either in the state school aid bill, at least the concepts, or it has been around for awhile."

Serving her first day in office, Rep. Georgina Goss, R-Northville, whose districts include Plymouth and part of Canton Township, said "charter schools sends alarm bells ringing. . . . It's such a new concept that I'd have to see more." Scholarships for potential teachers are "a wonderful idea."

Engler underscored his values not by introducing an outstanding scholar or favorite teacher, as his predecessor, James Blanchard, might have done, but by introducing "two

very special teachers — my mom and dad."

He covered five main areas:

- **Quality** — optional new schools, countywide schools of choice and 200-day school years in pilot districts.

- **Equity** — tax base sharing by richer districts — extremely unpopular among most area lawmakers except Keith, its architect.

- **Teacher improvement** — doubling aid for professional development, bonuses, easier certification for professionals with non-teaching backgrounds.

- **Job skills** — guarantees to employers of graduates' competence, school-employer partnerships with state aid to businesses who promise to provide jobs to graduates, more math and science centers.

- **Preschool** — tutoring and extended kindergarten hours for at-risk youngsters.

Arts foundation may seek new role

By Wayne Peal
staff writer

Arts Foundation of Michigan, the state's largest private arts group, has taken a low profile in the debate over state support for the arts.

That, however, could soon change. "We've kept relatively quiet, we still don't know how it's all going to fall out," said Kim Adams, Arts Foundation of Michigan executive director. "But we're still looking at taking a wider role."

The Detroit-based agency raises and distributes money statewide. "We're the ones who pay the playwrights to write the plays — who pay the choreographers to create the dances," she said.

Founded 25 years ago to supplement state arts funding, Adams said members now realize they must play a greater role.

The machinery is there, she said, for the foundation to serve as a United Way-type umbrella agency for the arts.

"Really, that's been our goal all along," the Oakland County resident

said.

If that is to happen, the \$250,000 raised last year won't be nearly enough. In the past, the agency raised some \$500,000 to establish the state Art Train program.

"I LOOK at what happened as an opportunity for us," Adams said. The foundation's new role, she added, will be determined by its members — most of whom support state arts funding.

"I think there is an important role for the state to play," Adams said. "But we have been raising our profile."

A greater fund-raising role could force changes in foundation operations. Foundation members pride themselves on using most of the money they raise to finance art programs, not fund-raising campaigns.

"I'd say about 70 percent of what we raise goes directly to art programs," Adams said.

While money is generally given directly to foundation-commissioned artists, regional arts groups — in-

cluding Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester — have received foundation grants.

The foundations seeks to finance innovative, original works.

"We're not going to give money to a local symphony that's going to perform Handel's 'Messiah.' That's been done before," Adams said. "But we will support a composer that's creating a new work, provided, of course, that it will be performed."

The foundation grew out of a 1960s citizen study commissioned by then Gov. George Romney.

Initially known as the Michigan Fine Arts Society, then the Michigan Foundation for the Arts, it adopted its current name to avoid confusion with the state-sponsored Michigan Council for the Arts. It is the state agency's future that is in question.

"Whatever happens, we'll still be around," Adams said. Arts Foundation of Michigan maintains offices at the David Whitney Building, Detroit. Those interested in joining, or in making a contribution, can call 964-2244, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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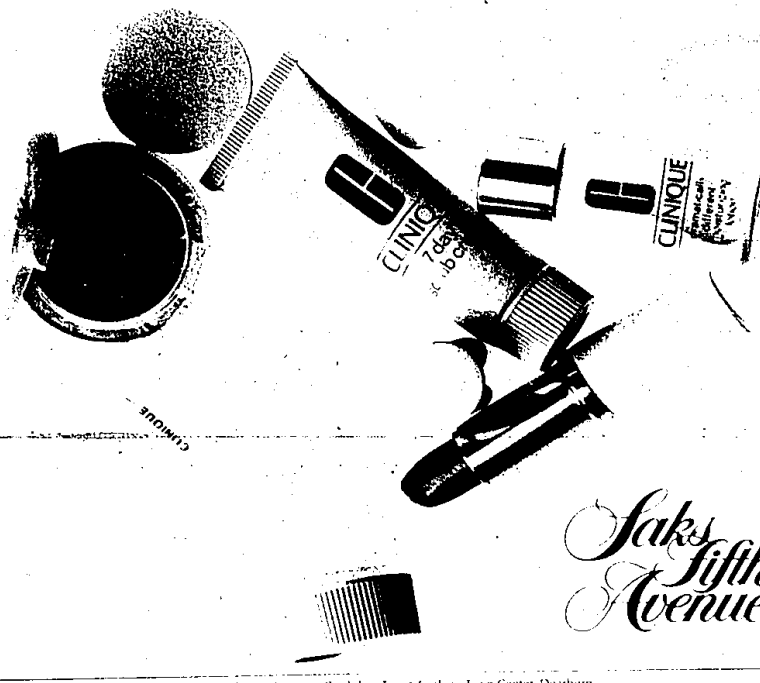
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