

Teacher tells lawmakers how German schools succeed

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Suburban lawmakers were stunned when Gabriele Barth told them how much one German state spent on its "dual system" of schooling.

Baden Wuerttemberg, whose 9.3 million population is identical to Michigan's, spends \$29.4 billion on everything, taxes income up to 53 percent, levies 15 percent on sales — and \$6 billion goes to education," the exchange intern said.

"It's a very expensive system," said Barth, a teacher and principal spending a year in the United States to upgrade her skills to the executive level.

Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, and others quizzed Barth Tuesday as the House Education Committee the relationship between industry and schooling in the reunited German republic.

Michigan's general fund budget is \$7.5 billion, with one-third going to all education. It taxes incomes at 4.4 percent and sales at 4 percent. The figures aren't comparable, however, because local school districts and

community colleges levy property taxes, and all colleges charge tuition.

HOW INDUSTRY supports Baden Wuerttemberg's "hauptschule" was the eye-opener.

In this six-year vocational system, for ages 10 to 16, German students spend 3 1/2 days in a company and 1 1/2 days in class.

The company pays them salaries and their social insurances, provides tools and instructors — 69 percent of the total cost, Barth said.

Local industries in this southern state are Mercedes-Benz and Porsche, the automakers, and many computer manufacturers — much like southeastern Michigan.

Curricula are set by committees of industrialists, trade unionists and educators. A youngster's "track" is determined by parents and educators, she said.

"Companies spend a lot of money on further training (of adult workers)," Barth added.

"GLOBAL competitiveness" is the buzz phrase in state capitals these days, Michigan's thrust is to make

students employable in an international economy.

The voc-tech "hauptschule" is one of three kinds of German middle schools, Barth said. Others are "realschule," six years of non-professional school, and "gymnasium," the academic school for university preparation.

Rep. Tom Middleton, R-Lake Orion, asked if the five former East German states have adopted this system. "Yah, sure," Barth replied.

Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton: How long has Germany been doing this? The system was adopted in 1949, Barth said, and the vocational training act came in 1989. "We had reform and structured the whole system."

Kosteva again: "How do you discuss new kinds of training?" Barth: A federal institute does much statistical research. Standards for new skills are developed as needed. "For 30 years we didn't have any occupations for computer science. Now we have many."

REP. JUSTINE Barns, D-Westland, had many questions about parental participation in setting standards and running school boards, and she wasn't pleased by Barth's answers.

"I don't hear just a housewife participating anywhere," said Barns. "I want my piece of the world represented."

Barns asked, "What happens to a student who doesn't pass (graduation) tests?" Barth: "He repeats the whole school year." She added the dropout rate was less than 2 percent.

Barth said, "Successful trainees become journeymen; they can become masters, technicians, instructors. The world is open to them." Germany's first astronaut studied plumbing in a Baden Wuerttemberg hauptschule before advancing to university physics, she said.

Companies themselves decide whether to take part in the dual system. "They train more than they can employ," she said. "Training is of increasing importance for the economic success of companies."

With the tearing down of European economic barriers, she said, a hauptschule graduate can work in France or any other country of choice. Hauptschule students must study at least one foreign language; gymnasium students, two languages.

"TAXES in America are lower than any country in the world," observed Nate Jonker, D-Clio, a former teacher.

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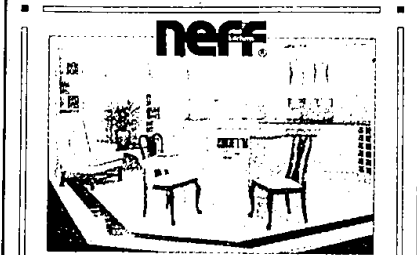
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