

# School tax plan hits most local districts hard

By TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

Suburban school districts are in for a period of belt-tightening, regardless of voters' action in a June special election on school finance.

Hardest hit will be out-of-formula (wealthy) districts. Tax bills for people in wealthy districts will drop the least, and all schools will have to pay all Social Security and retirement costs from money raised locally.

"You're getting less, no matter what happens," House Taxation Committee chairman Willis Bullard, R-Highland, warned Michigan Education Association members.

"Out-of-formula schools get less. It's like blackmail," said Bullard of the forthcoming referendum on raising the constitutional limit on the sales tax by 50 percent, from 4 cents to 6 cents on the dollar.

Bullard said lawmakers would prepare two school aid bills in April and May while waiting for the outcome of the special June election. One bill will figure in the sales tax increase, the other won't. "I call it damage control," said

Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, whose district would see just a modest property tax cut. "It's the difference between getting killed and getting badly bruised."

As Dolan saw it, if Farmington schools don't take the hit on the property tax cut proposal, they'll take it in legislative finance bills. Unionized teachers in high-paying suburban districts may face cuts. "There'll be strikes," Dolan predicted.

## Two measures pass

After a 14½-hour session, the House early Wednesday passed two measures: One gives more money to poor districts, the other works the greatest tax shift Michigan has seen since the first sales tax was passed in the Great Depression.

The House version of Senate Bill 146, the property tax cut, was adopted on a 96-0 vote. House Resolution G, the sales tax referendum, won on a 74-22

vote, one vote more than the two-thirds needed to put it on the ballot. Thirteen members either were absent or left the chamber before final action at 2:30 a.m.

All area members from Oakland County voted yes on both SB 146 and HJR G.

Both measures go to the Senate, where passage may come more easily than in the deeply-divided House.

## How districts fare

If voters say yes, here is how taxpayers in Observer & Eccentric school districts would fare under the proposed property tax cut, with current tax rate shown first, 1994 rate next and net cut last:

- Avondale — now 32.9 mills, to 27, cut of 5.95.
- Birmingham — now 26.67 mills, to 27, cut of 0.67.
- Bloomfield Hills — now 24.84 mills, to 24.84, no cut.
- Clarencville — now 41.4 mills, to 27, cut of 14.4.

- Farmington — now 31.5 mills, to 27, cut of 4.52.
- Rochester — now 34.56 mills, to 26.46, cut of 8.11.
- Southfield — now 34.83, to 27, cut of 7.83.
- Troy — now 30.99 mills, to 27, cut of 3.99.
- Walled Lake — now 36 mills, to 27, cut of 9.
- West Bloomfield — now 34.13 mills, to 27, cut of 7.13.

## House OKs key points

Here is the outline of the compromise legislative plan endorsed by Gov. John Engler and adopted Tuesday by the House of Representatives. Next stop: the Senate.

The purposes are to cut property taxes, limit assessment increases and bring equity to public school funding. Items labeled "constitutional amendment" must be approved by voters.

- Reduce school operating property taxes to 18 mills statewide by constitutional amendment. School boards in impacted areas could levy 9 mills more. Voters could authorize up to 27 mills. Current statewide average: 34.6 mills.

- Raise sales tax from current 4 percent to 6 percent by constitutional amendment. After Oct. 1, new sales tax revenue would be constitutionally dedicated to the school aid fund.

- Guarantee \$4,600 per pupil in every school district. It would be phased in: No district would have less in 1994 than in 1993; no district would receive more than a 10 percent increase per year. Districts would have to pay their own Social Security and retirement costs from their basic grants — no state payment.

- Limit property assessment increases by parcel.

Net tax impact: a cut of about \$200 million.

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