

Students plead for adult education funding

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Save adult education, they said. Two state Senators listened but far more legislators need to be convinced to continue funding.

Adult ed students, teachers, administrators and concerned citizens came from Ferndale, Oak Park, and Southfield, but were unified in their pleas during a legislative hearing held by Senate Democrats Wednesday at Farmington Hills City Hall.

State Sen. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Twp., chaired the hearing. He was joined by state Sen. Ken DeBeauneert, D-Chesterfield Twp.

Adult education funding would be cut from \$185 million to \$65 million in the proposed education budget.

That will likely affect people over 20, who would not be able to earn GEDs, take high school completion classes, or become proficient in English through state-sponsored adult ed programs.

Money would be better spent on job training rather than high school diplomas for adults, Gov. John Engler has said.

Adult education is about second chances, students said. Money spent on adult ed is returned to the economy in terms of productivity and to the state in taxes from improved wages.

"A very educated way to improve our quality of life is to provide education to adults so we can become role models for our children," said Vickie Knapp, 35, who dropped out as a teen at Southfield High and is currently enrolled in Farmington Adult Education.

Trish Lesondak of Farmington Hills testified she dropped out of school as a senior to attend beauty school.

She works for Head Start for 12 hours and attends high school completion classes while raising three children.

"It was my father's dying wish for me to complete my diploma," said Lesondak, 32, who hopes to finish high school by June 1997. "If funding is cut I will not look forward to completing this dream."

"I appreciate having a second chance and I want others to have the same chance."

Other echoed Knapp's and Lesondak's sentiments, if not emotionally than statistically.

The \$185 million spent on adult ed pales compared to the amount used to incarcerate prisoners, said criminal

defense attorney and Hills resident Carl Christoph.

An adult education official cited another statistic: People without high school diplomas earn 70 percent of the wages of a person who did graduate.

One person testifying was not swayed.

"Let's stop the rhetoric and get down to the numbers," said Bill Lubnaw, who described himself as an overburdened taxpayer.

His comments were followed by those of a woman, 36, who said she was illiterate and a high school drop out. She's 4 1/2 credits away from a high school diploma and carries an A-B average.

She held up an envelope containing a report card as proof.

"I think that young lady just sold you on the value," said Ruth Foster.

PTA hosts candidates

Farmington PTA Council is hosting a Meet the Candidates night 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, May 29, at the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center, 32500 Shilwaukee.

The forum will allow people to meet candidates for the June 10 Farmington school election. Ellen Bouchard, Priscilla Brouillette, Monica Schultz and Joe Svokos are vying for two open seats on the Board of Education.

Critic questions school spending despite state cuts in funding

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A Farmington resident chastised Farmington school officials for pouring out money when state aid is trickling in.

August Blomquist spoke out during a public hearing on the Farmington Public Schools' \$129 million proposed budget Tuesday. Blomquist, who is a school board watcher, was the only person who spoke.

Much of the 5-percent increase in expenditures are one-time costs associated with starting new programs, school officials said.

The general fund budget calls for \$108.9 million in revenue and \$114.3 million in expenditures. The \$5.4 million difference will be made up from the district's fund balance.

Farmington High's restructuring (\$1.7 million) and connecting the district to the Internet (\$2.47 million) are included in new expenditures. Farmington expects to see a \$113 increase in per pupil spending, which is below the rate of inflation.

"Tell me why do you think we should keep going and spending more than we can possibly get in operating income?" Blomquist asked.

'Tell me why do you think we should keep going and spending more than we can possibly get in operating income?'

August Blomquist

A panel of community and school people has been formed to look into cost containment for the district, trustee Dave York said. The committee is expected to give a report to the board in November.

Some 20 teaching positions will be added along with 1.5 paraprofessional positions. That follows 12 full-time and eight part-time positions added to the district payroll in last year's budget.

"When you talk about cost containment, I think you're going to be running into cost reduction," Blomquist said. "And I think it's very cruel."

"At the present time, if you don't do some of these things, you hire people ... you'll be firing people within several years."

Many positions added last year were for staff training purposes. Attrition over time should be able to absorb those positions, Superintendent Bob Maxfield said.

A healthy fund balance of \$25.5 million has allowed the district to add programs now instead of later when they would be more costly, school officials said.

"So it all makes sense to us," Maxfield said.

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