

Vouchers

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The number of signatures necessary to get vouchers on a ballot is 10 percent of the votes cast in the last preceding election. For example, if 200 people vote in Monday's school election, voucher supporters would need 20 signatures to put vouchers on a ballot.

School officials expect a low turnout this year because school board incumbents Priscilla Brouillette and Gary Sharp are running unopposed.

With vouchers, the state would allow students within qualified school districts and any approving districts to receive vouchers for tuition at private and parochial elementary and secondary schools.

Under this proposal, vouchers would be worth half of the state average foundation allowance. The state would keep the other half of the money, according to the state House Fiscal Agency.

The agency estimates vouchers will be worth \$3,457 for the 2001-02 year, but that number is certain to change.

Unlike funding for public schools, voucher amounts would not vary across school districts. But vouchers would be limited to the amount of tuition. If tuition is \$2,000 a year, the voucher would be worth \$2,000.

Since Steppingstone, an elementary school with 80 students, caters to gifted students, the curriculum could be compromised if

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Kiyo Morse

—Steppingstone headmistress

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

non-gifted students attended.

"If vouchers affected our normal procedures, we couldn't keep our school what it is," Morse said. "The families who come to this school wouldn't want our mission to change."

Steppingstone currently charges \$6,399 annual tuition, which would still be required under vouchers.

"If we have no restrictions, I'd have no problem with it," she said. "That's not likely to happen."

Sister Regina Marie Doelker, principal of Mercy High School, said she would welcome voucher students if her school was allowed to administer admission tests. She would welcome the voucher system, in theory, because it would offer parents financial relief.

The Catholic high school with 950 students charged \$5,976 per pupil this year.

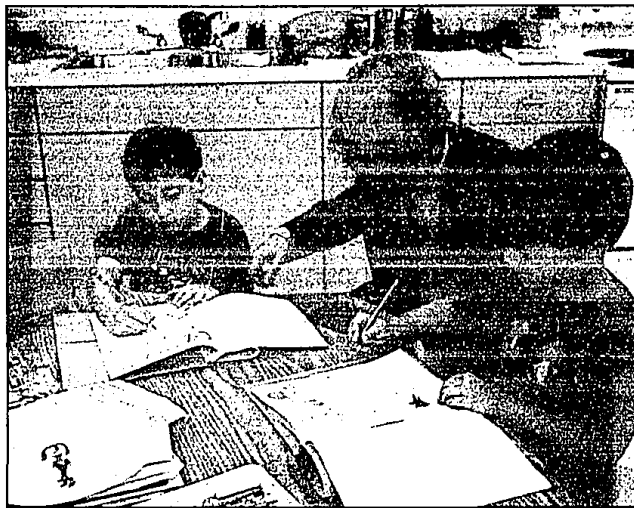
"We're all looking for the same goal," Doelker said. "We have to work so hard to get what we have. I believe strongly in getting support."

Jack Faxon, headmaster of the International School in Farmington Hills, says it would be inappropriate not to accept vouchers.

"I don't see any reason why we wouldn't accept vouchers," said the retired state senator. "But that doesn't mean I'm going out and promoting it. It's a form of payment. Not accepting vouchers would be the same as saying we wouldn't accept scholarships."

The International School, which specializes in foreign language immersion, will charge \$9,000 to \$10,000 tuition next year.

Steppingstone's Morse can appreciate the complications surrounding vouchers. She sent her gifted children to Steppingstone, thus paying taxes to support public schools in addition to



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BISHOP

Involved: Jack Faxon speaks with International School students Noel Herbert and Guillermo Sanchez, who are learning Spanish.

tuition.

"It's frustrating to pay taxes and not be able to use it toward your children's education," she

said. "I'm very sympathetic to parents. If there's a way we could all work this out, it would be wonderful."

Officials at Our Lady of Sorrows, St. Paul's Lutheran and St. Fabian did not return phone inquiries from the Observer.

Ballot language undeveloped

By TRACY BIRKENHAUER
STAFF WRITER

On Nov. 7, voters will consider more than tuition vouchers.

The proposed amendment to the Michigan Constitution will also provide for an increase in guaranteed per-pupil funding and teacher testing, according to petition language.

Specific ballot language hasn't been developed yet. Voters signed petitions to get these issues on a ballot. Language

Voters signed petitions to get these issues on a ballot. Language from those petitions has been used as an official outline of what to expect on the ballot.

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The petition reads: "The legislature shall provide for regular

testing of the knowledge in academic subjects of teachers in public schools and in nonpublic schools which redeem tuition

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