

With state surplus, legislators complain that record increase in school funding isn't enough

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It was billed as "the largest single increase in school funding in the history of this state" by House Appropriations Committee Chair Terry Geiger (R-Lake Odessa).

But since the state government is enjoying record surpluses these days, other lawmakers complained the Legislature should be allocating even more toward education.

Senators and Representatives wrapped up work this week on a budget that sets K-12 school aid spending figures through fiscal year 2002-03. They had already set the budgets for the current year, 1999-2000, and next year, 2000-01.

But as they carried their financial plan forward two more years, through adoption of Senate Bill 1044, they added supplemental appropriations for school districts boosting up current and next year spending.

The budget bill added \$90 million in the 1999-2000 fiscal year, already under way. It hiked per pupil "foundation grants" by

\$4,000-5,700. Foundation grants for next year, 2000-01, were hiked \$134 per pupil to \$6,000.

Setting fresh budgets for the next two years, lawmakers continued the pattern, hiking foundation grants to \$6,500 for 2001-02 and to \$6,700 for 2002-03.

Along with the \$90 million in the first year, the bill added \$368 million for next year. Then for 2001-02, the total allocation comes to \$11.6 billion. In 2002-03, the figure comes to \$11.9 billion.

The budget includes \$600 million of entirely new programs, including:

- \$135 million for early intervention programs for children ages 0 to 5, a new grant program through which districts will try to send "home visitors" to the house of every new parent in the state.

- \$126 million for summer school programs for children in grades 1 to 4 with low test scores.

- \$110 million for teacher technology, including computers and Internet access.

- \$102 million for school infrastructure.

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- \$60 million for teacher and school counselor training.

- \$32 million for Golden Apple Awards to reward high performing elementary schools.

- \$18 million to expand the Michigan Virtual High School.

- \$17 million for a new education performance database.

- \$10 million to support families seeking to gain employment.

- \$15 million for districts "whose governance has been restructured in state statute."

Gov. John Engler praised the bill, saying it "increased funding for schools to the highest levels ever."

Geiger had equal praise for it, saying the budget solved the long-standing Durant lawsuit disputes. He also said the package "builds on Proposal A, which

dramatically reduces inequity" between rich and poor school districts. Although the difference in funding between Michigan's richest and poorest districts is currently about 2 to 1, it used to be 3 to 1 as recently as 1993 before the passage of Proposal A.

But not everyone was enthused with the bill.

"I think that what we have to do is recognize that the second and third years of this budget really are fictional budgets," Sen. Alma Wheeler Smith (D-South Lyon) said. "Everybody knows that we'll come back a year from now and pass a supplemental that will add additional dollars. That's going to make sure that the School Aid Fund is even larger than it is currently, and we'll have an even larger surplus in that amount. We could use that money to reduce

class size, pay for special education appropriately, or do any number of things that will improve the educational quality in this state. We chose not to do any of those things but chose to disguise the fact that we have the additional money that ought to be spent on schools."

Reps. Patricia Lockwood (D-Fenton), David Woodward (D-Madison Heights), Gilda Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods) and Ruth Ann Jamnick (D-Ypsilanti) filed a protest over the bill, stating that: "With the current budget surplus, Michigan could finally meet its obligations for funding special education. Unfortunately, this budget does not address that funding. Instead, the Governor's proposal shifts funding around without adding the needed additional dollars. Finally, lowering class size is a proven method of improving student achievement. This budget provides a pittance for smaller class sizes."

Rep. Ruth Johnson (R-Holly) opposed the bill saying it gave an additional \$15 million to Detroit schools and transferred \$250 million from school aid to the general fund.

But Rep. Mike Kowall (R-White Lake) thought it a good solution to K-12 funding, noting the increases in the budgets "far exceeds inflation."

In the House, representatives approved the bill in a 68-40 vote. Here's how area lawmakers voted:

Yes — Reps. Mike Bishop (R-Rochester), Bob Gosselin (R-Troy), Mike Kowall (R-White Lake), John Pappasgeorge (R-Troy), Nancy Quarles (D-Southfield) and Marc Shulman (R-West Bloomfield).

No — Reps. Patricia Godchaux (R-Birmingham), Gilda Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods), Ruth Johnson (R-Holly), Andrew Raczkowski (R-Farmington Hills) and David Woodward (D-Madison Heights).

Senators voted 28-8 for approval of the school aid budget. Area votes:

Yes — Sens. Bill Bullard (R-Highland), Mat Dunnakes (R-Lake Orion), Shirley Johnson (R-Royal Oak) and Gary Peters (D-Bloomfield Township), voted yes.

No — Sen. Alma Wheeler Smith (D-South Lyon).

IN BUSINESS

Comerica Bank announced that Janet (Priola) Pearce of Farmington Hills has been promoted to senior vice president, Corporate Banking, based in Detroit.

Pearce joined Comerica in 1986. Most recently she served as first vice president, Credit Administration, in Detroit.

Pearce holds a bachelor's degree from Wayne State University and an master's degree from the University of Detroit.

Comerica Bank, the largest

bank in Michigan, is a subsidiary of Comerica Incorporated (NYSE: CMA), a multi-state financial services provider headquartered in Detroit, with banking subsidiaries in Michigan, California and Texas, banking operations in Florida, and businesses in several other states. Comerica also operates banking subsidiaries in Canada and Mexico.

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