

# Some say 'big increase' in school funding not 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 Jerry 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 previously approved "foundation grants" by \$4 to \$5,700. Foundation grants for next year, 2000-01, were hiked \$134 per pupil to \$6,900.

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 \$66 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.

## New programs

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 1-4 with low test scores.

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

- \$102 million for school infrastructure.

- \$80 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 longstanding Durant lawsuit disputes. He also said the package "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.

## Some opposed

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. Area representatives voting yes were: Reps. Bob Brown, D-Deerborn Heights, Eileen DeHart, D-Westland, Bruce Patterson, R-Canton, and Laura Toy, R-Livonia.

Voting no were: Reps. Tom Kelly, D-Wayne, Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, and Andrew Raczowski, R-Farmington Hills. Senators voted 29-8 for approval of the school aid budget.

Area senators voting yes were: Sens. Loren Bennett, R-Canton, Bill Bullard, R-Highland, Mat Dunaskis, R-Lake Orion, Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, Thaddeus McCotter, R-Livonia, and Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield.

Voting no were: Sens. John D. Cherry Jr., D-Clio, and George Z. Hart, D-Deerborn, voted no.

## Church from page A1

According to city officials, the First United Methodist would have collected that money from the vendors and then turned it over to the festival board.

## Options

"If the church prevails in court," Richards said Tuesday, "then I think there will be one of two outcomes. (The city council will) either have to revise the ordinance, ... or the festival is in jeopardy. It is absolutely critical that that festival board be able to manage the festival" according to the ordinance.

Farmington City Attorney John Donohue Wednesday said whether First United Methodist "wants to participate under the banner of the festival is totally up to them. But if they choose not to, they need to come in and get a permit for outdoor (activities). Or, get a second special event permit."

Donohue said the Masonic Temple, which in previous years hosted independent craft vendors, did comply with the ordinance.

"Part of our concern in dealing with the church," Donohue continued, "is here were Masonic people participating under the permit. If we ignored the church situation, certainly people at Masonic Temple could complain."

Long-term economic stability for the festival was the goal of last year's restructuring, and a reason why the festival board is requiring those \$50 permit fees.

The board, nonprofit Farmington Area Family Festival Inc., with representatives from the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills - took over and hired organizer/promoter Watts Up Inc. When those changes were made, they were for the festival to become economically self-sustaining. Until 1999, the chamber of commerce underwrote financial losses.

But with attendance and business apparently down and reviews mixed following this year's event, some further study might be in order, Richards acknowledged.

## Transition time

"Any time there is major change of a community institution, we can expect some transition bumps in the road," said Richards, who did say he heard as many or more positive comments about this year's event than negative ones.

Promoter Mike Watts Wednesday said he saw some definite positives, such as increased participation from families (see related story). But he added that running successful festivals is "an ongoing process, you're always trying to fine-tune it."

The festival took place in June, directly against the Livonia Spree, instead of in mid-July. A number of changes were implemented in terms of event offerings and appearance, and the event itself was re-named.

Communication between the festival board and downtown merchants about those changes and what was expected of them became a major sore spot earlier this year, and at least one merchant would like to see all of the issues put on the table for discussion in the near future.

"I certainly do feel they should have a post-festival meeting," said Farmington Bakery co-owner Jeff Pavlik, a member of the revived Downtown Farmington Business Association, a chamber sub-committee. "People need to hear about this stuff and speak out. My main concern is I don't want carry-over negatives."

Meanwhile, Richards said it is a no-win situation for the city to be pitted against First United Methodist.

"We did everything humanly possible to avoid writing that ticket," Richards said. "There were months of discussion" between city attorney John Donohue and the attorney representing the church. "This is a very difficult position to be in, the city of Farmington versus the Methodist church."

Kevin Gushman, director of Farmington Public Services, said the church and three other ticketed businesses "had been forewarned of the consequences if they did not pull a permit."

Besides First United Methodist, tickets were issued to the Bon Ton Shoppes, Eye Spy Eye Care and Mutual Financial, although Gushman said the latter did finally pay the permit fee.

## Boys State governor is from Farmington

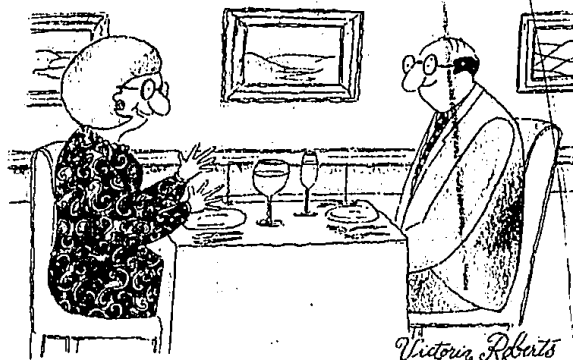
Delegates to the 2000 American Legion Boys State, in session at Michigan State University, elected David Kinchen of Farmington as the Program's Governor. He is now the executive head of the Boys State Program comprised of 504 young men from high schools throughout the State.

Kinchen, a 17 year-old junior from North Farmington High School was sponsored to Boys State by Farmington American Legion Post 348.

The program, begun by the American Legion nationwide in

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1935, provides practical instruction and experience in democratic processes based on Michigan's current state government system. Boys State is offered annually through the American Legion State Headquarters in Lansing via high schools and local posts.



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