

Poorer schools start state funding suit

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A group of the state's poorer school districts is asking Wayne Circuit Court for permission to sue the state over what they see as "unusually unequal" funding of public education.

"We're asking the court to rule on the use of public funds to challenge the constitutionality," said Dr. Richard W. Wilson, superintendent of the Brandon School District in northern Oakland County. Wilson chairs the coalition of 250 "in-formula" districts whose administrators say they're underfunded.

The districts are trying to win permission for the suit from the circuit court because it is against state law to use public funds for a lawsuit.

"Currently, it's not lawful," Wilson said, citing a remark in a 1984 Court of Appeals decision. "But if it's carefully examined, the court may well reverse it. The Supreme Court has never ruled."

"IN-FORMULA" districts receive state appropriations. "Out-of-formula" districts have larger local prop-

erty tax bases and receive no state aid.

In-formula districts say that, even with state aid, they are treated unequally. Per-pupil spending ranges from about \$2,000 to more than \$8,000. The smaller amounts are spent in rural and poorer urban districts with little industry. The larger amounts are spent in the high-technology suburban districts of Oakland and western Wayne counties.

Oakland districts included in the group asking for permission to sue are Brandon, Clarencville, Clarkston, Ferndale, Holly, Oxford and Pontiac.

Wayne County districts include Flat Rock, Garden City, Hamtramck, Lincoln Park, Redford Union, Rockwood Gibraltar, Southgate, Woodhaven and Wyandotte.

Officers of the group, besides Wilson, are Byron Love, deputy superintendent in Pontiac; Gene Karrow, superintendent of Bridgeport Spaulding Community Schools in Saginaw County; and James Brady, superintendent of Bear Lake Schools in Manistee County.

WILSON SAID that should the co-

alition be allowed to continue, a second suit would be necessary to win a court decision that Michigan school funding is so unequal that it violates the constitution.

He said statewide equity would cost \$2.5 billion to \$3 billion under a formula the caucus will propose. The group's goal is to place 85 percent of students under a state aid formula. Currently, only 60 percent are in-formula, he said.

In contrast, House Joint Resolution B, rejected by the state Senate March 15, would provide only \$500 million in new money to education,

although it would have resulted in statewide property tax base sharing. "The caucus believes that the current method of funding is so unequal that it will not stand serious judicial challenge. However, it is necessary first to ascertain the legality of utilizing public funds for such a purpose," the caucus said in a statement.

It has hired John P. Jacobs of the Detroit law firm of Plunkett & Cooney to file the first suit today.

THE CAUCUS said it is "dismayed over the lack of governorship on the part of the governor and the Sen-

ate" for the stalemate in Lansing.

Gov. James Blanchard, a Democrat, is expected to seek a third term. His likely Republican challenger is Senate majority leader John Engler of Mount Pleasant.

During 1987-88, the Legislature wrestled with more than a dozen different versions of plans to cut school property taxes, raise the sales tax and raise state funding to poorer districts, but could reach no agreement.

Three other efforts are under development on the school funding front:

- State leaders again are asking Edgar Harden, former president of

both Northern Michigan University and Michigan State University, to help them reach a compromise on another proposal that could be put before voters.

- Engler allies are preparing petitions for a ballot question that will require larger and larger percentages of the state general fund budget to go to education.

- The In-Formula Caucus said it is considering its own ballot petition for 1990 "to provide constitutional language to make clear the state's constitutional responsibilities in this matter."

Room, board rise for OU residents

Rates for Oakland University students living in residence halls will rise 6.5 percent in the 1989-90 fiscal year.

In addition, rates will increase 7.7 percent for students living in the Matthews Court Apartments, commonly known as "family housing." OU officials blamed rising ex-

penses — notably insurance, salaries, wages and utilities — for the increase.

The following are residence hall plans for 1989-90:

- Regular academic year room and board, 19 meals a week, \$3,059, an increase of \$188.
- Regular academic year room

and board, 14 meals a week, \$2,932, an increase of \$179.

- Regular academic year room and board, nine meals a week, \$2,813, an increase of \$173.

- Regular academic year room only, \$1,939, an increase of \$118.

- Summer session room and board, \$777, an increase of \$48.

- Spring session room and board, \$694, an increase of \$43.

- Summer session room only, \$459, an increase of \$29.

- Spring session room only, \$486, an increase of \$30.

Monthly rent for Matthews Court Apartments will now be \$350, an increase of \$25.

Warnke to give peace lecture

Paul C. Warnke, formerly head of the U.S. Arms Control Agency and chief U.S. negotiator for the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, will present the annual Cranbrook Peace Foundation lecture Sunday, April 2, in Christ Church Cranbrook, Lone Pine at Cranbrook Road, Bloomfield Hills. The public lecture begins at

7:30 p.m. and is free.

The Cranbrook Peace Foundation has two goals: educational and support for peace organizations in southeastern Michigan.

Information about it is available from executive director Felix J. Rogers, a private practice cardiologist, in Trenton, at 676-2220.

Genealogists meet April 4

The Oakland County Genealogical Society will hear Mary Lou Bacon, who has served as an officer of the Flint Genealogical Society and as a delegate to the Michigan Genealogical Council, at 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 4.

Bacon will present a talk entitled "Ontario-Michigan Genealogical Research." She will share her experi-

ences of researching Michigan ancestors with Ontario roots.

Meeting place is the Rotary Room of the Flint Public Library, 300 W. Merrill, two blocks south of Maple and two blocks east of Southfield Road, Birmingham. It is open to the public. For information about the Genealogical Society, contact Lois Ellis at 751-5204.

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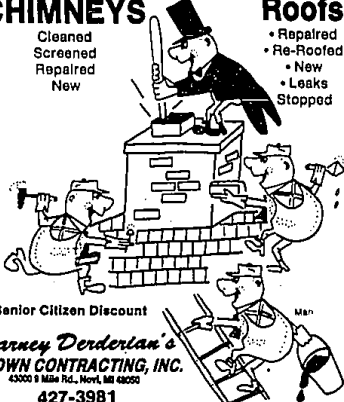
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