

'School-of-choice' bill passes

By TIM RICHARD
staff writer

Without a word of debate, the Michigan Senate passed a bill allowing parents to choose which school their children will attend. Senate Bill 51 goes next to the House.

The vote was 30-4. Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, joined three Detroit senators in opposition.

Sens. Richard Foster, R-Commerce, and R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, missed the vote. "School choice is the wave of the future in education," said the sponsor, Sen. Richard Posthumus, R-Lowell, after the vote. He added the bill would "make schools more competitive and improve the brand of education available."

THE BILL, if enacted, will allow parents to choose between school buildings within a district. There is a formidable burden: 25

percent of those voting in the most recent annual school election would have to sign a petition asking for an election on the question.

"From Gov. Blanchard to President Bush, school choice is regarded as one critical step we can take to improve educational quality," Posthumus said.

A Gallup Poll in 1987 showed 68 percent in favor of the right to choose between public school buildings, he said.

The concept was pioneered in Minnesota under Gov. Rudy Perpich. In southeast Michigan, it was pushed by Metropolitan Affairs Corp., a research and info. firm funded by major corporations and unions.

As a state senator, Perpich discovered, while he was serving in St. Paul, that his children were repeating school work they had done in their home town of Duluth.

FAXON SAID the bill was on a

fast track, and the roll call was under way before he had a chance to speak. He had two basic objections.

• Suburban parents in effect have schools of choice because the parents chose to live in a particular community. Many school districts — such as Ferndale, Berkley and Novi — have only a single high school, while Farmington and Southfield have only two.

• In Detroit, the system would result in "administrative chaos. The logistics are impossible," he said, citing transportation costs.

Parents who had moved to a desirable neighborhood within Detroit so that their children could attend a particular school, he said, would be irate if suddenly they found their children excluded because others had registered first.

THE BILL could be applied only where a district has two or more schools with the same grade level.

Voters would have to petition for such an election before Jan. 1, 1990. The local board of education must submit the question at the next regular school election.

If it's adopted, the board must establish "a planning committee composed of one-third parents, one-third teachers and one-third principals and pupils." The committee would be subject to the state Open Meetings Act, and all its documents would be subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Its program must be submitted to the State Board of Education.

The plan would cover an information program, access to counseling, and a transportation plan for children from single-parent, two-career and low-income families.

The plan also would have to explain "how pupil assignment and transfer policies will maintain school district standards of racial and ethnic integration."

OCC hits spring enrollment high

Oakland Community College recorded its highest spring enrollment in five years for the spring term, which began last week.

The five-campus OCC will have 14,754 students taking nearly 61,000 credit hours, both five-year highs for the school's spring enrollment. That averages to just over 4 credit hours per student.

Both student numbers and credit hours tally 5 percent higher than last

spring enrollments and slightly above projections.

"It's an indication of the increased demand for trained people by Oakland County employers," said George Cartsonis, communications director.

Generally, the school records its heaviest enrollments around 28,000 students, during fall and winter terms, which are each 15 weeks long. Spring term is 7½ weeks long,

with twice as many credit hours required each week.

The average age of OCC students is 27, Cartsonis said. Only about 20 percent are right out of high school. "Our college caters to a drop-in student," Cartsonis added. "They

take their education at a pace that suits their needs."

Tuition is \$33 per credit hour for county residents; \$55 per hour for Michigan, but not Oakland County residents; and \$80 for out of state residents.

Heritage Briefings set

"The Imperial Congress: Crises in the Separation of Powers" will be the topic of discussion at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, May 18, at Roma's of Bloomfield, 2101 S. Telegraph.

Speaker Mark Liedi, director of special projects for The Heritage Foundation of Washington, D.C., will discuss congressional tendencies to manage details of defense and foreign policy, entrenched incumbency and irresponsible budgeting.

The Republican Committee of Oakland County will host the talk, which will be the first in its series of "Heritage Briefings," featuring policy experts and analysts from the

Heritage Foundation, which has been called "Washington's leading conservative think tank."

Liedi previously worked as director of research for the National Republican Senatorial Committee. He was managing editor for two Heritage Foundation books, "The Imperial Congress" and "Mandate for Leadership III," which was influential with writers of last year's Republican Party platform.

Cost is \$10 for the speech and question/answer session, with light snacks and a cash bar available. For more details or reservations, call 681-1990.

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