

MET update

Applicant numbers down from first year

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Some 15,476 people have applied for the Michigan Education Trust (MET), the state's prepaid college tuition guarantee program now in its second year.

Officials won't know how many actually enroll until after Nov. 30, the deadline for applicants to complete arrangements for financing. Last year, 82,495 people applied for MET and 40,402 eventually enrolled. Oakland County had the highest number of enrollments with 10,224, followed by Wayne County, which had 7,756.

This year's applications were higher than expected, according to Robert Kolt, spokesperson for the Michigan Department of Treasury

which oversees MET.

Last year's enrollment was preceded by three years of discussion and advanced publicity about MET, Kolt said. "So there was pent-up demand."

MET has again come under fire, however, from the Mackinac Center, a conservative think tank based in Midland.

In a press release issued last week, the center said its studies conclude enrollment in MET will cost parents 3 percent more than state officials anticipated in August. "Parents will now pay \$7,840 per newborn child to enroll in MET, a 3 percent increase over the original \$7,664 cost announced by state officials in August and 16 percent more than last year's \$6,756 enrollment figure."

GREG KAZA, a Troy resident who is vice president for policy research at the center, said the price increases cast doubt on the economic assumptions that underlie MET.

"Even a mild economic recession in the next decade could further affect the assumptions underlying the MET model, forcing a taxpayer bailout of the program or less independence for state universities," said Peter J. Boettke, visiting instructor of economics in the School of Business Administration at Oakland University.

Boettke also is author of a forthcoming study on MET sponsored by the Mackinac Center.

When informed of the content of the center's press release, Kolt dismissed the criticism as groundless.

"The Mackinac Center doesn't have the vaguest idea what MET is all about," Kolt said. "They (incorrectly) see MET as an investment."

"MET is designed as an insurance policy with which parents or grandparents can assure tuition costs for their youngsters."

On Oct. 2, the Mackinac Center and Boettke released an economic analysis concluding MET could not be justified on economic grounds at 13 of 15 state universities.

County Dems present panel on urban sprawl

A panel discussion on urban sprawl is set for 8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 14, sponsored by the Oakland County Democratic Party.

The discussion, open to the general public and which includes a question and answer period, will take place in the Board of Commissioners Auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac.

The panel will consist of: Edward J. Hustoles, deputy executive director of planning for SEMCOG; Mayor Walter Moore of Pontiac;

Donald F. Tucker, representing Western Development; and Oakland County commissioner Larry Pernick, D-Southfield.

William G. Wolfram, treasurer of the county Democrats, will act as moderator.

"We encourage public participation in this program," said Wanda Raeger, office manager for the county Democrats. "This is an issue that doesn't just affect Democrats - it affects us all."

Drug abuse funds available

Agencies interested in financial assistance to deal with preventing substance abuse should contact the Community Planning and Problem Solving Committee of the United Way of Oakland County.

The United Way has information on 35 grants, averaging \$200,000, available through the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention of the U.S. Public Health Service.

Grants are for programs that prevent substance abuse or treat or rehabilitate those already addicted.

Priority will be given to programs

aimed at primary prevention and early intervention with minority youth.

Agencies interested in applying for grants should contact Michael Martinez, planning director, at 456-8805.

The application deadline is Nov. 15.

The Community Planning and Problem Solving Committee is designed to act as a catalyst in helping the community identify and deal with community problems.

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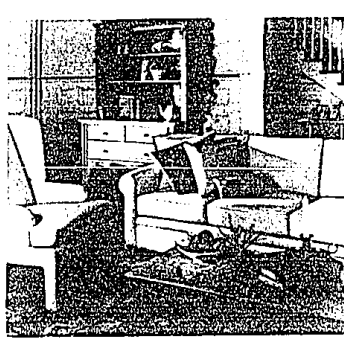
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