

Equal education amendment eyed for ballot

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A House panel is advancing a state constitutional amendment requiring "equal opportunity for education" amid fears it will hurt affluent suburbs in the name of helping the poor. The measure also would raise the proportion of the state budget spent on all education — kindergarten through the doctorate level — from the current 45.6 percent to 52 percent in five years. "Educational opportunity has been determined by property wealth," the sponsor, Rep. Kirk Profit, D-Ypsilanti, told the Education Committee Tuesday.

Help for adoptive parents

A workshop to help distressed adoptive parents will be held June 1, 8 am to 12:30 pm, at the Hamada Inn on Telegraph at I-96 in Southfield. "When Love is Not Enough: Issues and Strategies for Adoptive Parents

But an opponent, Rep. Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, said, "There's no guarantee this will help my school district. I'm elected to represent my district."

CHAIRMAN William Keith, D-Garden City, won passage of the plan, known as House Joint Resolution Q, and sent it to the House floor. The vote was 13-4 with two absent. Area members voting yes were Keith and Justine Barnes, D-Westland.

Voting no were Bankes and James Kosteva, D-Canton. Their major school districts get no state aid and are fighting Keith's efforts to eliminate their categorical aids.

of Special Needs Children" features James Mahoney, a family living consultant from Spokane, Washington. Post Adoptive Resources of Lutherville, an Adoption Services will sponsor the event. Call 968-1700 for more information.

The measure requires a two-thirds vote of both chambers to go on the Nov. 6 ballot and majority approval by voters to become part of the state constitution.

HJRQ would:

- Require the Legislature to provide "equal opportunity for education for each public elementary and secondary school pupil." (Currently, the constitution requires only "free" K-12 schooling without racial or religious bias.)
- Dedicate all lottery profits and interest to the school aid fund.
- Mandate the Legislature to raise spending for elementary, secondary, community college and higher education to at least 47.5 percent of available state revenue in fiscal 1991-2, then to 49, 50.5 and 52 percent by 1994-5.

"Available revenue" is defined as the general fund budget plus the dedicated school aid fund. First year improvement would be \$179 million, a co-sponsor said.

PROFIT SAID his proposal would

provide "a constitutional foundation" for equal opportunity — "not dollar for dollar; it would allow local school districts to enhance their programs."

Bankes said poor school districts which want to sue the state for more aid found their case was badly harmed because the state constitution currently fails to require equal opportunity.

"This would allow a judicial opportunity to override the Legislature and local control," said Bankes, pointing to court rulings in Kentucky and Texas.

"These 100 poor, in-formula school districts need 'equal opportunity' for their lawsuit to be successful," Bankes said after the meeting.

KEITH SAID said it's wise to lump all education funding into one budget category because "if you have a bulge (population boom) running through the system, you need the flexibility between higher education and K-12."

Another supporter, Rep. Joe Young Jr., D-Detroit, agreed, calling

the measure a "holistic" system. "I'd want heavy emphasis on K-12," Young added.

Bankes, however, fears the money will be dispersed too broadly.

"It can be dispersed without paying for social security, retirement or categorical," she said.

"If there's a recession," Bankes said, "maintaining 52 percent for education could mean cuts in social services and mental health."

"It was a philosophical vote and not a practical vote. Philosophically, I'm for it — but this is the real world."

A BUSINESS group opposed the measure, but three education groups supported it.

Steve Young, lobbyist for the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, objected to the "trigger language of equal opportunity . . . We don't need the buzzword language of equal opportunity." But he liked the section raising the state budget's percentage for all education.

Lobbyist Al Short said the Michigan Education Association, the

state's largest teachers' union, "fully supports it. Public education has to be priority number one for state government."

Ellen Hoekstra, representing the Michigan Federation Teachers, said that union "strongly supports" the measure. "If we look at other states' court rulings, we see 'equal opportunity' is more than an educational buzzword, as the State Chamber says."

Tom White, lobbyist for the Michigan Association of School Boards, said local elected officials "support the general concepts. 'Equal opportunity' provides a useful constitutional policy statement."

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