State ed board, lawmakers clash on issues

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The State Board of Education supports requiring 90 percent school attendance by students who want to take part in sports and other extracurricular activities.

The top elected board also supported Detroit's request for single-sex schools.

But the board, meeting in mid-December, opposed a bill to require one semester of Michigan history and another to ease the law against corporal punishment.

The state board is Michigan's top policy-maker for schools and frequently supports or opposes legislative bills affecting schools.

All proposals are in the House Education Committee, chaired by Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City. Keith has not yet set the agenda for January.

STUDENTS would be ineligible for intramural or interscholastic sports, clubs, performing arts and other activities unless they had at least 90 percent attendance the previous semester.

That's the essence of House Bill 5133, sponsored by Rep. Joe Young Jr., D-Detroit, a member of the Education Committee.

The state board gave 6-0 support to the concept. Missing were members Annetta Miller, D-Huntington Woods, and Marilyn Lundy, R-Grosse Pointe.

Educators are split. Some see mandatory attendance as a step toward improving school standards. Others see it as counter-productive: It denies an important chance to take part in school life beyond the classroom.

A student's excused medical absence would not be counted against him or her.

THE BOARD split 5-1 in support of bills to allow single-sex schools, along the line of Detroit's proposed black male academies.

The Detroit plan was overturned in federal court. House Bills 5171-2, sponsored by Rep. Hansen Clarke, D-Detroit, would amend the school code and Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to allow single-sex schools. A freshman, Clarke is a member of the Education Committee.

Supporting the concept were board president Dorothy Beardmore, R-Rochester, Cherry Jacobus, R-Grand Rapids, Barbara Du-Mouchelle, R-Grosse Ile, Rich DeVos, R-Grand Rapids, and Barbara Roberts Mason, D-Lansing.

Opposed was Gumecindo Salas, D-Lansing. Missing were Miller and Lundy.

Detroit hatched the academies last fall to address the low achievement, high dropout rates and violence problems faced by boys, particularly blacks.

The Department of Education staff recommended opposing the bills, saying there were constitutional problems with "separate but equal" facilities. "There is no evidence that the problems of black males are 'caused' by the presence of females," it added.

ONE SEMESTER of Michigan history would be required for high school graduation under House Bill 5259.

It is sponsored by Rep. Clark Harder, D-Owosso, a first-term lawmaker and Education Committee member who previously worked on the House staff.

The board opposed the concept on a 6-0 vote.

The bill runs counter to state board policy, embodied in Public Act 25, of setting goals for students to attain ("outcomes") but allowing local districts to decide how many semesters or weeks of a subject ("inputs") to teach.

In general, state officials look with disfavor on what they view as legislative micro-management of the curriculum.

A staff memo points out that the school code "requires public and non-public schools to give regular courses of instruction in the Constitutions of the United States and Michigan, and in the history and present form of government of the U.S., Michigan and its political subdivisions."

The school code also requires a one-semester course in civics for a high school diploma.

A BILL modifying a two-year-old state law prohibiting corporal punishment sailed through the state Senate in fall, but the state board opposes it.

Senate Bill 338, sponsored by John J.H. Schwartz, R-Battle Creek, would allow educators to use reasonable force against a student to defend themselves, another student, or property, to obtain a weapon, to prevent a student from harming himself, or to quell a disturbance.

Schwarz, who has served on both education money and policy committees, sees the bill as necessary to clarify teachers' authority.

The Department of Education staff, however, sees it as unnecessary because the state already has published a booklet, "Alternatives to the Use of Corporal Punishment." Staff added that it has received no complaints or questions on the problem.

THE PLEDGE of allegiance to the U.S. flag would be required at the beginning of every school day under a bill that won only 5-1 qualified support from the state board.

House Bill 5108 is sponsored by Rep. David Jaye, R-Utica. Jaye, a second-term member from Macomb County, has gained fame for carrying a pistol for self-defense after making critical comments about welfare recipients.

OCC registration starts Monday

Regular registration for Oakland Community College's winter, 1992 semester is scheduled for Monday, Jan. 6, and Tuesday, Jan. 7, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Students may register at any one of the campuses listed below. The *first day of instruction for the winter* semester is Wednesday, Jan 8.

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- Orchard Ridge Campus, 27055 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, 471-7628.
- Highland Lakes Campus, 7350 Cooley Lake Road, Union Lake, 360-3069.
- Royal Oak and Southfield Campus, 739 S. Washington, Royal Oak, 544-5574.

Applications for the winter are now being accepted. New students should contact the admissions office at the campus of their choice for a schedule of classes and more information on admission procedures.

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