

Area lawmakers dissect MEA plan

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

They're suspicious, but state lawmakers say the Michigan Education Association's sweeping school reform plan has points worth considering.

"It's refreshing the MEA is making a concrete proposal instead of opposing others," said Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville.

Geake summed up the reaction many lawmakers who had been angered by the teachers union's well-heeled opposition to Gov. John Engler's 1992 "Cut & Cap" property tax plan.

Dan Pero, Engler's chief of staff, praised MEA for picking up a pot Engler idled: using schools to deliver social, mental health and other state service. "We call it one-stop shopping. We wouldn't just use schools eight hours a day," Pero said.

EDUCATION

into 14 multi-county financial districts.

Wayne and Monroe counties would be one district. Oakland, Livingston, Lapeer and Genesee would be another.

"The financial districts will improve efficiency in the areas of personnel, transportation and administration," said Julius Maddox, president of the 125,000-member teachers union.

Called "Schools for the 21st Century," MEA's proposal also calls for:

- A 30-mill cap on property tax rates. Statewide average is about 34 mills. One mill yields \$1 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation (SEV).
- Power for financial districts to ask voters for additional revenue through millage or a local income tax.
- State dedicated resources to guarantee equitable funding behind every pupil.
- Provision in school buildings of

state social, public health, mental health, legal assistance and job training services.

"I'm not sure 14 is the right number, but we need to reduce the number of districts," said Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills. "It makes my plan look conservative." Faxon sponsored a bill to reduce the number of districts from 563 to about 200 and ran into a political buzzsaw in mid-Michigan.

"I like the idea of consolidating school districts," said Rep. John Jamlin, R-Bloomfield Township. "But I part company with MEA on the (local) income tax. They're not concerned about the taxpayer."

"Some parts are worth looking at," said Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills. "They've finally come up with something positive. But Michigan has been very, very strong on home rule. I don't see local districts relinquishing control without a fight."

Sen. Mat Dunokis, R-Lake Orion, praised the MEA plan for "loosening up some regulations

Yea! MEA's not just naysayer

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

Local schools officials may or may not think the Michigan Education Association's plan for school finance reform is a good idea, but they agree it's nice to see the MEA is proposing reform instead of opposing it as usual.

"I think the MEA is trying to do something positive, and to that extent, I think it's great," said Bob Greene, the director of evaluation and research for Troy schools. "They recognize that the change is in the wind."

William Keane, the superintendent of the Oakland County Intermediate School District, agreed. "It's probably good that the MEA is interested in finding a solution for our funding problems as they apply to property taxes," he said. "The MEA is a big player, so it's good to have them at the table. (But) I don't know how much political support there is for that plan."

The idea is to organize the state's 563 school districts into 14 financial districts in order to consolidate functions like purchasing and transportation.

The financial districts would also levy up to 30 mills of property tax. Then a 3-percent increase in the state income tax

would be needed to boost all the school districts up to the same funding level.

Keane suggested that perhaps the teachers union officials, accustomed to bargaining tactics, have presented a very extreme version of what they really want because they expect to lose ground in the bargaining process.

The way the plan is now, Keane said, "but you have to balance that with what you lose when you get further away from your constituents (with the huge districts)."

James Clatworthy, the associate dean of the school of education at Oakland University, is apprehensive about the MEA plan because it would eliminate the state's 57 intermediate school districts, which are organizations that provide services most school districts can't afford on their own.

"Initially I'm discouraged because they want to eliminate all of the intermediate school districts," Clatworthy said. "They provide a lot of resource support that districts probably couldn't provide on their own."

14 districts

Main feature of the MEA's school reform plan is reorganizing the state's 663 school districts

Archer talk begins African American month at OU

A scholarship banquet, lectures and art exhibits are among public events scheduled starting Friday through Feb. 29 for Oakland University's African American Celebration Month.

All of the following events are open to the public. Only Friday's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Keeper of the Dream" banquet requires an admission charge. The \$25 banquet fee will support scholarships for OU disadvantaged students.

Public Events:

- Jan. 29 — 6:30 p.m. banquet,

Crockery, Oakland Center guest speaker Dennis Archer "The Plight of America's Cities: Defining the Dream in the Nineties." Charge \$25, black tie optional, for tickets 313-370-2020.

- Feb. 1: All day, African Marketplace, Crockery, OC. Meadow Brook Art Gallery, African Art Exhibit, Wilson Hall, all month.
- Feb. 7: OU Gospel Choir, 6:30 p.m. East Crockery, OC.
- Feb. 8: Lecture, Brother David X speaking on "Your Heritage" at noon, Fireside Lounge, OC.
- Feb. 10: Lecture by Lowell Per-

ry, "The Importance of the Black Male," noon, Fireside Lounge, OC.

- Feb. 12: Lecture by Vanessa Johnson-Durgans, "Black History Through Memorabilia," 10:30 a.m., Gold Room, A, OC.
- Feb. 17: Emery King, "A Day in the Life of an African American

Journalist," 7:30 p.m.

- Feb. 18: Lecture on "All Male Academics" with Kwame Kenyatta, noon, Fireside Lounge, OC.
- Feb. 24: Discussion on "The Black Jewish Experience" at noon, Fireside Lounge, OC.
- Feb. 26: Closing Ceremony and Awards, noon, Gold Rooms, OC.

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