

# Panelists: Education needs overhaul

By RALPH R. ECHTINAW  
Staff Writer

The Oakland County League of Women Voters set sail Wednesday on a study of education with a sparsely attended lecture by three area education professionals.

The Oakland League intends to investigate the status of education in Michigan with a series of committee meetings, hopefully to be addressed by people who work in the education business, said program organizer Ann Glenn.

Once the study is complete, the Oakland League will likely become an advocate of one sort or another in education, Glenn said, perhaps taking a stand on one of the five or more education finance reform plans now floating around the state.

"We'll make a study, and then we can take action," Glenn said, inviting one and all to take part if they care to. "Anyone can get involved who would like to get involved." (Call 647-1358).

Few people got involved Wednesday, however, as less than 20 attended the education forum called "What's on the Line?" in the Oakland County commissioners' auditorium. (The event was videotaped and will be shown in Rochester and Troy on cable channel 62 at 9 p.m. March 18 and 25.)

The panelists were Oakland Schools director of general education Rebecca Rankin, Michigan Board of Education trustee Marilyn Lundy and Detroit schools assistant superintendent for empowerment, diversity and choice Sharon Johnson-Lewis. (Detroit schools deputy superintendent Arthur Carter was supposed to attend, but canceled at the last minute.)

The panelists agreed that the state of public education is relatively bleak. Rankin noted that a lot of reports she's seen recommend a "fundamental restructuring" of the public schools. Compared to other developed nations, she said, "we end up dead last or

very close to the bottom. We have very few people performing at the level we need."

As for the fundamental restructuring . . . "It's going to be extremely difficult because at the present time we're also running out of money."

Johnson-Lewis noted that Detroit schools have a 35 percent drop-out rate and 85 percent attendance. They're not talking about "reform" anymore in Detroit, she said, but rather about "educational transformation."

"We're not doing a good job motivating our students," she added. "(But) we have to deal with them in the classroom or

deal with them in the streets."

Lundy said part of the problem is that schools are very good at public relations. "Too often, I think, we cover (problems) up," she said. "We have propagandized so well that people think we're that good."

Among the three panelists, Lundy alone lobbied last week for some sort of "schools of choice" plan whereby parents would have a say in where their kids go to school. "I believe in full choice," she said. "Let's open up to all the resources we have out there."

The public schools, Rankin and Lundy agreed, try to teach too much, as weird as that might

sound. "The curriculum is over-stuffed and undernourished," Rankin said. Added Lundy: "We gave (students) such a smorgasbord that many of them missed out on the basics."

As for the many school finance reform plans out there, Rankin and Lundy agreed that getting any one of them in place won't be easy, and even then it might not be the best plan for the future of education.

"Sometimes political expediences result in short-term solutions," Rankin said. "Each different party seems to have a different primary interest," Lundy said.

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## Smoke free schools sought

The Michigan Coalition on Smoking OR Health will seek tobacco-free schools as part of its 1993-94 legislative session. The group includes the American Cancer Society and American Lung Association.

Dr. Albert Sparrow, chairman, said its agenda will include:

- A statewide tobacco-free schools policy.
- Increased non-smoking areas in restaurants.
- Expanding the Clean Indoor Air Act into private workplaces.
- Increasing the state tax on tobacco products and licensing retailers.

"The recent Environmental Protection Agency report makes it clear that there is still much to accomplish to reduce the health risks for children and workers," Sparrow said.

"The EPA report named tobacco smoke as a Group A carcinogen, joining a select group of the most toxic substances known to cause cancer in humans, including benzene, radon and asbestos.

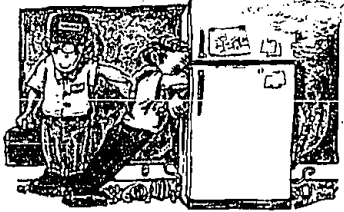
"The coalition will work toward improved air quality for restaurant patrons. Contrary to tobacco industry claims, the experience of many restaurant owners shows that smoke-free restaurants do not suffer economically," he said, citing California.

The coalition will support changes in the law which would affect private sector workplaces. "We are continually getting complaints from persons employed in the private sector where smoking is allowed in the workplace," Sparrow said.

Other priorities will include support for licensing tobacco retailers and increasing the state tax on tobacco products. Increasing the tax on tobacco from 25 cents to 50 cents would encourage 71,000 people to quit smoking or never start, according to the coalition.

In the 1991-92 legislative session, the coalition was instrumental in passage of four bills which protect children and reduce youth access to tobacco products by restricting vending machine sales, eliminating the mailing of free tobacco samples, prohibiting the sale of individual cigarettes, and banning smoking in licensed child care centers.

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