

Students challenge effects of school reform

BY HELEN NIEMIEC
STAFF WRITER

Area students with a vested interest in Gov. Engler's plan to restructure school finances pulled no punches, asking questions and challenging new ideas as they met with state Sen. Dave Honigman, R-West Bloomfield.

Honigman invited 10 students to his home Tuesday night to watch the WDIV-TV Channel 4 Town Meeting with Gov. John Engler. The hour-long program gave the students from West Bloomfield High, Detroit Country Day and South Lyon High a chance to listen to the issues and hear the governor's response. The students jotted notes during Engler's talk and Honigman occasionally would interject who a particular speaker was or explain a political term.

Key concerns to the students were loss of talented or athletic students because they could transfer to schools that specialize in one area or one that is an athletic powerhouse. They also were concerned about the funding, voicing worries that sending the same amount to each district would make all schools suffer rather than improving the districts that need help.

It was a casual setting. Honigman and the students sat in his living room and bandied about ideas and opinions. The two Honigman cuts strolled in, stopping for a bit of attention, though they didn't divert the students' interest.

West Bloomfield High School students involved in the exchange were Michelle Berris, Barry Rosenberg and Scott Buser.

Question charter schools

Especially critical, they said, was the concept of "charter schools" wherein an industry or a university could open its own school.

Buser wanted more specific information on how a charter school is formed. Honigman explained that a business or educational institution can come up with an organizing board of trustees, set a curriculum and then seek out students. The funding would come from student enrollment since the \$4,000 per pupil allocation follows the student and is not earmarked to any one school.

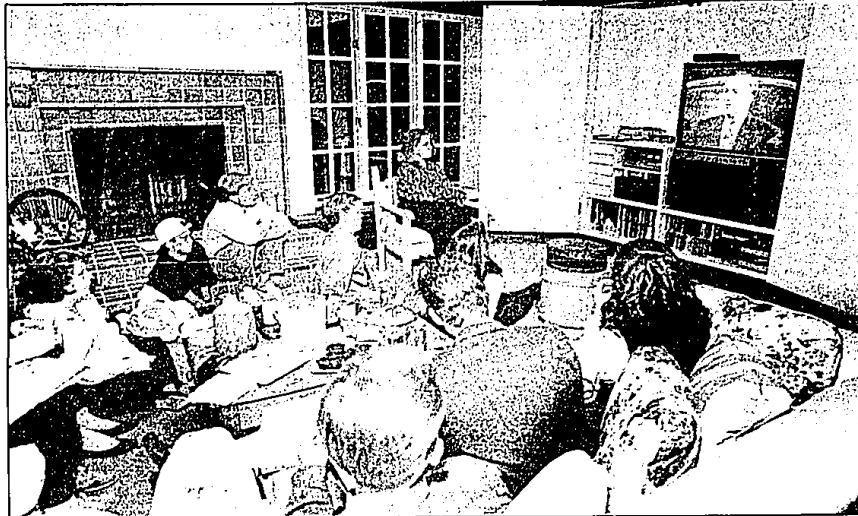
"What if all the talented people chose the charter schools?" Rosenberg asked. "As I see it, there's a benefit here for smart or talented kids. I worry about the average kids. They won't have the same choices."

As for the specialized schools, Rosenberg said that if there is an engineering school in the district or nearby, then the local high school may not offer a class in calculus because the majority of students who would have enrolled would be attending the other school.

Honigman said the charter school concept would admit students by lottery and wouldn't bleed the local schools.

"Now every school tries to be everything to everybody. We're asking them to do too much," Honigman said.

Even with the charter schools and the chance to transfer to school districts with "open" borders, Honigman said the vast majority of students still would opt to attend their neighborhood school both because of conven-



STAFF PHOTOS BY JOHN STORMZANO

All ears: Dave Honigman (at fireplace) occasionally interjects a comment as he and the students view Gov. Engler's televised explanation of the school financial package.

ience and because their neighborhood friends would attend there.

Honigman told them that by not guaranteeing enrollments, schools would have to compete and improve their offerings to attract students.

Skeptical of financing

Making sure that West Bloomfield schools maintain their level, the students voiced concerns that with the state guaranteeing one level of funding, that there may be

a problem to pass a millage that would continue the current funding level, which is \$4,000 per pupil above the state allotment.

Rosenberg wondered how many millage election attempts a school board would be given to supple-

ment the state funding and whether the difference would have to be renewed in a lump sum.

"Bloomfield Hills is at \$10,700 per student. If they lose one millage, will they drop down to \$4,500?" Rosenberg asked.

Undivided attention: West Bloomfield High students Michelle Berris and Barry Rosenberg focus on the plan's details.



Look up - Edison is clearing lines

Detroit Edison's line clearance crews will continue projects as well as begin new work in our Oakland County communities of Birmingham, West Bloomfield and Auburn Hills now through December.

With the summer storm season nearly over, Edison's line clearance crews are bracing for the next punch — winter ice storms. Lightning and high winds can play havoc with tree limbs too close to electrical lines and equipment. But winter ice storms are

even more difficult for line crews to work around, said Robert J. Buckler, Edison's senior vice president for energy marketing and distribution.

Line clearance — a major part of the utility's three-year, \$235 million program to improve electrical service — includes maintaining 10-foot minimum clearances between tree branches and wires.

"Trees that touch energized lines can conduct electricity and pose safety hazards. In addition,

interference from just one tree can cause outages that affect hundreds of customers served by the same electrical circuit," Buckler said.

"During the past year, the utility has reduced the number of outages by nearly 30 percent and shortened the length of unavoidable outages by 77 percent compared with the average of the previous three years.

"We've been able to prove that there is definitely a correlation between line clearance and reli-

able service."


From 1991 through this year, the company will have spent \$101 million on line clearance. All work is performed by professional line-clearance crews.

"Trees are trimmed according to National Arborist Association standards, which are designed to protect the trees and keep them healthy," Buckler said.

A new customer toll-free telephone number — 1-800-477-4747 — also was established as part of service improvement.



Mulling changes: Sen. Dave Honigman and Elliott Weiner, 10, of Franklin buddy up to hear the Engler plan, which Honigman supports.



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