

Sowerby from page 1A

Sowerby, 61, was appointed to fill a term on the city council and ran unsuccessfully. Sowerby opposed the charter change that calls for a directly-elected mayor, but said because of the change, it was all the more important that the first directly-elected mayor set the tone.

Sowerby said residents have complained that if a council

member runs midway in his term, the council, rather than the voters, would select the person to serve out that term.

"They're stunned to hear that," he said. "The council just didn't think this through. It's something we need to address."

Councilman Jon Grant, who pulled out of the non-partisan

mayoral race, said he had not expected Knollenberg to make an endorsement.

"I'm also surprised that Joe has gotten involved in local politics," Grant said.

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi, who is the only announced opposition to Sowerby now that Grant has pulled out, said endorsements

by state or national candidates sometimes backfire. Vagnozzi, who campaigned for Jack MacDonald in an unsuccessful bid for judge, said many people he talked to resented that type of endorsement.

"He (Knollenberg) doesn't live in the community," Vagnozzi said.



'Frankly, I believe Paul represents the kind of person we need as a mayor. Although I don't always endorse, it doesn't mean I won't endorse in some race across the district.'

Joe Knollenberg
U.S. congressman

Schools hoping to get bundle of cash from state

BY SANDRA ARMBRUSTER
STAFF WRITER

A \$400 million recommended payout to 81 schools districts in Michigan could be "absolutely devastating to the state," according to John Truscott of the governor's office.

The state Court of Appeals is expected to rule soon on a mediator's recommendation that could return \$400 million to the districts, including many in the area.

Truscott said the state doesn't have enough money anywhere in its budget, and that cuts would have to be made, or "we would have to raise taxes, and that just isn't going to happen."

Waiting for action on the recommendation is Judy White, assistant superintendent for curriculum of Farmington Public Schools.

"We handle everything very cautiously," White said. "Rumors are rumors and we do not usually

end up getting windfalls (of money), although a lot of hype happens."

Topping the list of area districts and their expected payouts are Birmingham with \$17.3 million, followed by Troy with \$16.9 million and then Farmington and Rochester with \$16.7 million each.

Other area districts and the projected amounts they would receive include: Avondale, \$3.6 million; Lake Orion, \$3.2 million; Novi, \$4.6 million; Oakland Intermediate School District, \$5.6 million; Southfield, \$9 million; South Lyon, \$3.3 million; West Lake, \$8.6 million; and West Bloomfield, \$9.1 million.

"Technically it's \$8 million that we would receive," said Ron Rohlfman, Southfield School District director of finance, "but

million could be added for the last two years.

"They owe us the money," said Ronald Miller, deputy superintendent of the Birmingham School District.

At issue is non-funding of mandated school programs, primarily special education and special education transportation. "They have to quit the unfunded mandates. They just can't pass all that back to the school districts," Miller added.

Truscott, noting that there have been changes in the way education is funded in the state, said that "special education — from our perspective — has been fully funded. Michigan has spent more than the national average. We've been very generous. Funding has been fair."

Pollard argued that "there was

a deliberate pattern of avoidance, and this (recommendation) is the final vindication of that."

He explained that the Headlee Amendment was designed to "control the level of taxation, (but) one way to slip past was to stop funding programs or order the local unit of government to do without funds."

He called it "playing games," adding that the "data is all in."

Chris DeWitt of the state Attorney General's Office, which represents the state board of education, doesn't agree.

"Our position is that special education funds — and the bulk of the money is special education funds — are a federal requirement, not a state requirement. Therefore, they're not a requirement under the Headlee Amendment."

"It's far from over," DeWitt said. He predicted the case will go to the Michigan Supreme Court, if the appeals court agrees with the recommendation of special master (an Old English term) James Miles, who was assigned to help with the fact-finding.

The case has been before the high court before, Pollard said, adding that this result is "what was ordered to happen."

But will school districts ever see any of the money? "We'll be lucky to see it happening," Miller said.

Should the court decide in favor of the school districts, future state aid budgets would be affected, according to both Truscott and Pollard.

Contributing to this story were Wayne Peal, Tom Baer, Greg Kowalski and Alice Collins.

CLARIFICATION

The names of Daniel MacIver, Steven Maki, and Mark Mallon were inadvertently omitted from the list of 1995 graduates of Clarenceville High in a story in the June 22 Observer. These three seniors did, indeed, receive their diplomas June 16.

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Dr. Peter Krutisch is the Director of Health Checkup Centers, located at 2203 Grand River in Farmington, MI. He may be reached at (313) 471-6886.



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