

Engler puts emphasis on education

BY MIKE MALOTT
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Evoking an image of East Germans clambering over the Berlin Wall to freedom, Gov. John Engler stole a line from President Ronald Reagan for his State of the State address Wednesday evening.

"Let me remind you that our Constitution established a system of free public education. It did not give districts the right to hold families captive behind a wall of separation called a district line," Engler said. "All families should be free to choose their public school."

Then, using words from Reagan's famous end-of-the-Cold-War speech, Engler urged state lawmakers to "tear down those walls!"

The image was enough to make some lawmakers uncomfortable.

"It is not one I would have used," said Rep. Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield. She doesn't favor raising the cap on the number of charter schools without more accountability. "I do not feel we should just let them go and look away."

Additionally, Quarles wants a plan in place for improvement of public schools, so that charters don't get them and "leave empty walls standing."

Rep. Laura Toy, R-Livonia, said she, too, is unsure how well unlimited charter schools will work.

"This is an effort to put some entrepreneurial spirit into education," she said. "That's a nice approach, but you don't know how these things will work out because they are not strictly for-profit enterprises. There are other more important factors to consider."

Engler upped the ante in his annual address, his 10th State of the State speech, delivered to a packed House chamber in the Capitol Wednesday night. Last year, he advocated raising the cap on the number of charter

schools from 160 to 200. In his most emphatic point of the evening, Engler called on lawmakers to "abolish" the cap altogether.

"He was talking about choice," Rep. John Pappageorge, R-Troy, said. "It's a different kind of barrier and it needs to be removed."

Even though Pappageorge favors raising the cap on charter schools, he's not sure he's willing to allow for "unlimited" charters.

On the other hand, Rep. Paul DeWeese, R-Williamston, thought Engler was on the money. But then, DeWeese is a strong advocate of charter schools and was the primary sponsor of the bill last year to raise the cap.

"In certain instances, the child is not served well at all by being bound to a school that is not performing well. For that child, it is a life and death issue. If we don't equip children with the skills to go out into the world, they'll be confined to a certain kind of life. If we don't give them a quality education, we undermine them for life," he said.

But is it politically feasible, considering the Legislature wouldn't agree to 50 more last year?

"I think this is a matter of quid pro quo," DeWeese said. "He's put a lot more money in here. There's the \$6,500 grant. There's the Golden Apple Awards. There's the computer equipment for teachers, and all that I think will be contingent on removal of this cap. There are a lot more carrots in here."

Education was the primary theme of Engler's State of the State. He offered a long list of changes, but his proposals won mixed reviews.

"He talked about \$6,500 foundation grants for students in a 'multi-year budget,'" said Rep. Laura Baird, D-Okemos. "In a couple of years, we would have been there anyway."

"I find it a little disingenuous," said Democratic party chair Mark Brewer. "He's spent the

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 —Livonia

last nine years dismantling education and attacking public schools. Now he wants to be the education governor."

Some of Engler's plans did play to universal approval. All lawmakers queried favored his proposal to create a new Golden Apple Award program, providing cash incentives to all employees of schools that rank high in improvement or overall achievement.

"I thought there was some balance there," Rep. Ling Brewer, D-Holt, said. "The poorer districts can qualify for at least one of these awards. Of course, the highest achievement award will go to the richest districts."

"Cash can be a strong motivator," Rep. Valde Garcia, R-St. Johns, said.

One of the more unusual proposals put forward by Engler was for the creation of a "Principal's Bill of Rights." Few details were given, but the gist of the plan is to give school principals more authority to run their buildings.

"I haven't seen the details yet," House Speaker Chuck Perricone, R-Kalamazoo Township, said. "And it needs to be fleshed out. But I'm highly supportive of the concept. If we are going to make principals responsible for their buildings and their programs, let's give them the authority they need to do the job."

Pappageorge seconded that. "Principals need to have the authority to run their buildings efficiently. We don't want some administrators telling them they can't have more brooms when they need them. The same goes with disciplinary matters," he

said.

Because the Principal's Bill of Rights includes authority to "hire and fire building staff," DeWeese concluded that could mean Engler intends to attempt to reform teacher tenure.

"You might see something come forward," he said, "not eliminating tenure but changing it to make it easier to discipline or fire bad teachers."

Democratic chair Mark Brewer read it the same way. "I just see this as another attack on organized labor," he said.

Engler won his longest standing ovation of the evening in an entirely different area — when proposing that the income tax rate be cut to 4.2 percent.

Rep. Nancy Cassia, R-Novy, head of the House tax policy committee, said she was very excited about the proposal. She agreed that despite Engler's multiple proposals for new spending, there should be enough money in the budget to also cut taxes.

But Ling Brewer called it "dangerous."

"One day this booming economy is going to end and we are going to need the money," he said.

Republicans were strongly supportive of Engler's plans for a one-time, intensive effort to get the last 38,000 remaining families off welfare roles.

Democrats generally cautioned that the program needs to be done carefully to assure recipients aren't just pushed off the roles without adequate income or benefits.

CARRIER OF THE MONTH: FARMINGTON

Heather Allison of Farmington has been named December's Carrier of the Month for the Farmington Observer. She is the daughter of Bob and Sue Allison and has an older brother, Bob. Heather is an honor roll student at Harrison High. Her favorite subjects are Spanish, civics and math. In spare time she enjoys computers, hunting, playing flute, boating and fishing. Heather is also a black belt in karate. Following high school she plans to attend college and work for the CIA or the FBI.

Heather enjoys meeting and talking with customers on her route and has learned responsibility and money management through her experience.



Heather Allison

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Many districts are "well-managed and relatively efficient," he said.

Engler also suggested making summer help available to second- and third-grade students who have reading problems; requiring summer school for those who have not mastered the subject by the fourth grade.

Although those ideas are nice, "Why not put more money into early education programs?" asked Maxfield.

Farmington school board President Priscilla Brouillette also gave Engler credit for emphasizing education in his speech, for recognizing "its importance to the future success of the state."

But she tempered her optimism with concerns that Engler "continues to feel that more charter schools are the solution to the troubled public schools we know exist in some areas of Michigan."

The governor, continued Brouillette, is a "champion of public funds being spent on experimental schools, despite the fact that there is no accountability attached to the funding, and a great many examples of

charter schools failing to measure up. I do not know of any Farmington parents who would be comfortable with educational experiments involving their children."

Brouillette said she was troubled by Engler's attempt to generalize that what works in the competitive business world could carry over to education.

Another point she took exception to was Engler's focus on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, namely offering cash incentives to top-performing schools and districts.

"I think Governor Engler's plan failed to acknowledge that students come to school more able to learn if significant support systems are in place at home," Brouillette said. "We need to send a strong message back to the state that encouraging competition between schools for funding will only hurt those kids who most need society's support."

Brouillette agreed that early childhood education being one avenue to take a closer look at. "I saw that (topic) as a huge omission in the governor's plan."

These 37 didn't sell to minors

Following are the 37 Farmington Hills restaurants and bars which Hills police praised last week for refusing to sell liquor to minors:

Alfresco Restaurant, Anita's Kitchen, Applebee's, Bambonole's, Benihana, Best Western, Blakney's Ranch House, Brass Pointe, Buddy's Pizzeria, Cafe Cortina, Carlito's, Carver's, Chili's, Copper Creek Golf/The Inn of Copper Creek, Country Lane's, Drunkenhire, Lanes, Olanohai, Hakata Japanese Restaurant, Holiday Inn/Pompano's, House of Ing, Hunan Palace, La Shish, Lone Star Steak House, Macaroni Grill, Max & Erma's, Mulligan's Pub & Grub, Priya Indian Cuisine, Northwest Lanes, Player's Billiards, Pony Express, Radisson Suite Hotel, Roosevelt's, Ruby Tuesday, Shot's Tavern, Sitar Cuisine of India, Steak & Ale and Tribute Restaurant.

A story in the Jan. 2, 2000, issue said 42 businesses were checked in the police department's semi-annual city-wide Liquor Compliance Operations sting. However, two of the 42 were not open, police said.

Three of the 40 firms in the sting sold liquor to the 19-year-old police decoys and were ticketed by police for the infractions.



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PLYMOUTH Tuesday, February 1, 2000 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. (evening) Plymouth Cultural Center 315 Farmer Rd. (then, N. Terminal & S. Mile off Seward)	NORTHVILLE Wednesday, February 2, 2000 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. (afternoon) Northville Public Library 212 W. Cady (Downtown Northville)	WATERFORD Thursday, February 3, 2000 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. (afternoon) Waterford Senior Center 6455 Harper

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