Clarenceville chief disputes S&P study comparisons

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If you ask Clarenceville Schools Superintendent Tom Tattan what he thinks about the Standard and Poor's evaluation of his school district, the answer you'll get – in short – might be "not much."

That's not a direct quote, but Tattan takes issue with a number of the study's elements.

"It's 2000 data, and the peer group they put us in makes no sense at all," he said.

Commissioned by the state at a cost of $12 million over five years, the school evaluation compares districts not only to a state-wide average, but to an average among what the firm considered "comparable" districts. Tattan said Clarenceville is grouped with outstate cities PawPaw, Imlay City, Whitehall and Chessening – which doesn't provide an accurate picture for a number of reasons.

"Our wage scales and our cost of doing business are very different," he said. "They choose the peer groups based on enrollments and free and reduced lunch costs. Everybody in Michigan knows it's night and day."

In outstate Michigan, the differential in teacher's salaries is startlingly different from those paid in the Detroit area, and particularly in affluent suburban counties.

"Imlay City is in the thumb. They have no pressure to pay wage scales like we do in Oakland County," Tattan said. "I didn't need Standard and Poor's to tell me that."

Additionally, school districts may do their accounting differently. In Clarenceville, worker's compensation funds are included in the administrative services budget, which skews administrative costs.

Because the data is old and comparisons are unfair, Tattan doesn't believe the report as its published is much help to parents who want meaningful information about their school district. But then again, he hasn't heard from any parents who have actually seen the data.

"I don't think it's useful," he said. "At $12 million, you begin to question the expenditure. We need to be looking at the stuff that's going on right now."

Data in the report includes:

- Operating expenses of $7,863 per student, as opposed to $6,311 in "peer" districts and $6,975 state-wide
- Instructional expenses of $4,222 per student; $3,876 among peers and $4,167 state-wide
- Average class size, including special education, of 18.7 students per teacher, compared to 18.8 students per teacher in peer districts and 17.5 state-wide.
- Average teacher salary of $52,025, compared with $47,436 in peer districts and $46,860 state-wide. However, average salaries in neighboring Livonia and Farmington are $53,067 and $55,253, respectively.

Additional information is available on the Standard and Poor's web site: www.ses.standardandpoors.com

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you walk into the building?" – he said.

Maxfield recommended that parents who do peruse the results be on the lookout for consistency in test scores, minority achievement and class size.

"And maybe that's why I don't get calls," he said. "People understand that. It's good data, but the kind of parents we deal with recognize there's more to it."

Other indicators in the report included:

- A 1.7 percent drop-out rate, which is moderately below the 3.6 percent state average
- A graduation rate of 93.6 percent, moderately above the state's 86.6 percent average
- Advanced placement test participation levels at almost 30 percent, with more than three-quarters of those students receiving scores of 3 or higher
- 2000 operating expenditures per student is listed at $10,121, a 3.8 percent average increase; the average among districts Standard & Poor's considered comparable was $7,826, with a 2.6 percent average increase. Instructional expenditures were $5,412 and $4,684 in comparable districts; administrative expenditures were $515 per student and $427 in comparable districts.
- In Farmington, the average teacher's salary is $55,253, as opposed to $61,506 among comparable districts.
- Average class size in Farmington Schools, including special education, was 15.2 to 1, which is below the state average of 17.5 to 1 and comparable districts, 19.6 to 1.

Additional information, including explanations of how data is presented and calculated, is available on the Standard and Poor's web site: www.ses.standardandpoors.com

Alameda

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Logan Stapleton, a kindergartner, eagerly demonstrated his ice skating technique without skates on a dry floor.

The students made flags to represent various countries. "We'll travel around the world," said kindergartner Griffin McCormick.

They also learned manners and were told if they fell down, they should get right back up.

"The people will cheer for you," Humphries said.

In true Olympic fashion, the children were awarded ribbons for their participation.

"Everybody is a winner, and you have to have good sportsmanship," Humphries told her class.

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