

MACOMB

District's Schools of Choice policy questioned

By Frank DeFrank

frank.defrank@macombdaily.com, @filefrank on Twitter

Conventional wisdom says Schools of Choice policies help school districts offset declining enrollment and provide additional funds from the state that benefit all students.

But that wisdom is being challenged in L'Anse Creuse Public Schools, where a groundswell of opposition has surfaced in advance of the Board of Education's scheduled decision on whether to renew the policy.

"It'll probably be a 4-3 vote," said Pamela Hornberger, a L'Anse Creuse board member.

When Macomb County school boards vote every year whether to accept students from outside their districts, the exercise is usually a formality.

So when L'Anse Creuse elected officials gather Jan. 26, they'll likely find waiting for them a recommendation from Superintendent Jackie Johnston to renew the district's current policy and accept students from other Macomb County communities.

"We all recognize the importance of maintaining high-quality schools that

provide global opportunities and meet the needs of all our students," Johnston wrote in an email response. "Schools of Choice families help to further these goals as they are strong supporters of our district; many are very involved in their child's school, and their enrollment creates additional opportunities for our all of our students through increased revenue"

"Currently, all Macomb County school districts are participating in the program as it is considered a "Best Practice" by our state legislators, thus resulting in significant additional "Best-Practice" funding."

Hornberger recently won re-election to her second term on the L'Anse Creuse board. She admits long-standing opposition to Schools of Choice.

The second-term board member, who works as an art teacher in the East China school system, said the additional money a district receives for each outside doesn't cover the cost of educating them.

"(The district administration) leads the public to believe it's going to save us financially, but it's not," Hornberger said.

Hornberger said she



Forlini



Hornberger

found plenty of support when she canvassed district neighborhoods during her campaign.

"Not one door that I knocked on did anybody say they favored Schools of Choice," she said.

Hornberger said students already enrolled under School of Choices would remain in L'Anse Creuse until they graduate, but she would like the Board of Education to "take a cold, hard look" at the policy to determine if it's really beneficial.

Hornberger has an ally in Lansing, State Rep. Anthony Forlini, a Harrison Township Republican, weighed in when he distributed an email addressing the issue to his constituents.

"Through the years as

your state representative, residents as well as teachers have contacted me regarding (School of Choice)," Forlini wrote. "They feel that the district has reached out to recruit kids for the sole purpose of gaining dollars ... Whether you agree with this or not, I feel that it is prudent to let your superintendent and board members know your opinion."

Admittedly "not a big fan of Schools of Choice," Forlini said he has opposed overtures by Gov. Rick Snyder to expand the program.

Forlini also balked at a suggestion that injecting himself into a school district matter strays outside his scope of responsibilities as a state lawmaker.

"It's my community," he said. "I represent the same people ... It's a topic for all of us."

According to figures provided by the district, L'Anse Creuse currently enrolls 1,227 Schools of Choice students.

That figure represents about 11 percent of the student population.

Last Minute