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PRIVATE SCHOOL ADVOCATES SEEK STATE REIMBURSEMENTS

Since the state mandates private schools maintain certain records about students and staff, advocates say those schools should be reimbursed with tax dollars despite the Constitution stipulating no public money can be appropriated directly or indirectly to aid or maintain private schools.

But Paul Stankewitz, policy advocate for the Michigan Catholic Conference, said providing these reports does not encourage students to attend private schools, nor would the reimbursement payments be used to pay for teachers.

"It's not about asking for money," he said. "It's asking for a basic level of fairness."

At an education reform workgroup Wednesday, he and Brian Broderick, executive director of the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools, made the case that the state has a vested interest in providing for the safety of all students, regardless of what type of school they attend.

These mandated reports include information on curriculum, criminal background checks on staff and immunization records for students.

[Rep. Earl Poleski](#) (R-Jackson) said many of the reports the schools are required to collect are ones the schools would collect anyway to make sure they hired qualified teachers, and ones with clean backgrounds. He asked why the state then should pay these schools to do something they would do anyway.

Mr. Broderick agreed that most of these reports would be done anyway, but he added that if non-public schools didn't exist, it would cost the state much more.

Mr. Broderick said Catholic school enrollment in the state has dropped from 95,000 in 2000 to about 60,000 this year. That is largely attributed, he said, to the downturn in the economy and parents being unable to afford the private tuition.

As non-public schools close, or students leave and enter the public education system, they become a cost to the state, he said.

The students in nonpublic schools save the state about \$700 million annually, he said.

Non-public school advocates did not provide an estimate on how much the reimbursements would cost the state each year, or how to devise a formula that would properly quantify how much it costs for each non-public school to comply with state mandates.

In Ohio, Mr. Broderick said non-public schools receive about \$275 per pupil from the state.

Mr. Stankewitz said New York, Indiana and Louisiana also reimburse some costs to non-public schools.

"There is precedent across the nation," Mr. Stankewitz said.

[Rep. Bill Rogers](#) (R-Brighton), who has led the workgroup this summer, said businesses also have a number of state regulations with which they have to comply and aren't reimbursed and are sometimes even charged to fill out the paperwork.

He said he is open to having a discussion on the issue, but doesn't foresee it being legislation that's going to happen this fall.

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