



## Michigan Report

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### **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS BACKING CHOICE EXPANSION**

[Governor Rick Snyder](#)'s proposal to expand school choice will not just increase opportunity for public school children, Michigan Catholic Conference officials told Gongwer News Service this week in explaining their support for the package.

Among the key provisions of the package is requiring schools, if they have room, to allow in students from other districts. But the package will also provide additional opportunities for Catholic, and other private school, students to partake of public school offerings.

Most of what is proposed would merely expand on what private schools are already doing, said Tom Hickson, legislative director for the Catholic Conference.

At least one of the proposals could potentially benefit public schools as well, Mr. Hickson said. Private school students are already allowed to participate in public school classes through shared-time arrangements. But the bills would increase the boundaries of those agreements, he said.

Current law allows private school students to enroll in a non-core course, like an art or advanced language course, in the district in which the private school is located or in any contiguous district. Mr. Hickson said many Catholic elementary schools are able to enroll their students in band at nearby public schools through the program.

The idea behind the program is to allow private school students to attend courses their school may not have enough students to offer. Mr. Hickson said in some cases the public school also does not have enough students on its own. "Alone, there's not enough to have a teacher. Combined, there's enough to have a class," he said.

The proposal would expand that to any school in the intermediate school district of any contiguous ISD in which the private school is located.

Students would then have more opportunity by being able to select courses from a broader range of districts, Mr. Hickson said.

The expansion could also make it more cost effective for public schools to add a course by drawing students from a wider group of private schools in addition to their program, he said.

Changes to dual enrollment would make it easier for both public and private high school students to attend a college course, Mr. Hickson said.

Under current law, a private school student must essentially enroll in two courses in the public school: the dual-enrollment course and one other that makes the child a student in the district.

The change would allow any private high school student to enroll in a college or university course without

also having to take a class at the public high school. Under the current draft, Mr. Hickson said the money would simply flow through the local district to the higher education institution.

"We see this as removing a barrier," Mr. Hickson said. "It would allow any student to have a piece of that aid and go directly to the university."

He expected the bill would be a wash financially for local districts.

But it would increase dual enrollment opportunities for public school students as well. Current law allows dual enrollment only for juniors as seniors in high school. The bill would add freshmen and sophomores to that list.

Mr. Hickson said neither of the proposals constitute vouchers or courts would already have rejected them.

The Catholic Conference is expected to testify on the measures next week.

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