

M-G board opposes state voucher expansion, ESA creation

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The Madison-Grant school board joined a growing number of boards and districts across the state formalizing their opposition to proposed changes to school funding being considered in the legislature.

At Monday's regular meeting, the board approved a resolution stating its opposition to bills that expand the state's voucher program and establish education savings accounts (ESAs), specifically outlined in House Bill 1005 and Senate Bill 413.

Legislators are considering approximately \$378 million of additional education funding in this biennial budget, but projections show nearly \$144 million of that total could go to an expansion of the state's voucher program for private schools and for the creation of ESAs.

Superintendent Scott Deetz read the resolution into the record prior to the board's vote, which stated the board believes the General Assembly should not create an ESA program or expand vouchers but should instead "continue to promote and fully invest in Indiana's public schools."

The resolution states instead of the voucher and ESA programs, the additional investment should go to public education because it is designed "to serve all children." Specifically, the resolution calls for increased funding for teachers' salaries in accordance with the recommendations from the Governor's Teachers Compensation Commission report from Dec. 2020.

"...Public schools are required to operate in an open and transparent way with all expenditures and decision making," Deetz read from the resolution. "Non-public schools are not held to that same public standard...Indiana already has school choice in the form of open enrollment, charter schools and virtual online schools and the choice scholarship program."

The Oak Hill school board passed a similar resolution last week, and Mississinewa's school board also passed a resolution opposing voucher expansion and ESA creation at its regular meeting Monday.

In other business, Deetz told the board plans are moving forward for nonprofit primary and behavioral health care provider Aspire Indiana Health to purchase and occupy the former M-G administration building on the junior/senior high school campus. The district moved out of the building and it is currently vacant after renovations to the junior/senior high.

Deetz said the district filed for rezoning of the building Monday and will appear with Aspire at the next Grant County Board of Zoning Appeals meeting on April 5 to seek approval for the rezoning. In the meantime, school nurses, social workers and counselors have been meeting to brainstorm ways Aspire's nearby services can be leveraged and taken advantage of by district students, Deetz said.

"After spring break, Aspire will begin joining the virtual sessions so we can begin meeting and working on those processes on how to arrange for services for everybody," Deetz said. "And so we're looking forward to getting some of those things going before summer gets away from us."