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MIDLAND DAILY NEWS

MIDLAND, MI

CIRC 19,238

MAR 16 2008

Mackinac Center launches school checkbook transparency project

The Midland-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy is trying to get Michigan's public school districts' spending information in comprehensible form on the Internet.

The effort — which might help save tax money — is part of Sunshine Week, which begins today. That's a national initiative stressing open government and freedom of information.

The center will begin contacting Michigan school districts directly to stress the value of spending transparency and to facilitate access to this information, according to Policy Analyst Kenneth M. Braun. The center will compile a single web listing for districts that participate.

"Michigan spends about \$19 billion a year in local, state and federal tax dollars on public education," Braun said in a prepared statement. "That's quite a significant number when you realize that the state's total budget is \$43 billion. Anything school districts can do to be open about how they spend tax dollars will enhance peoples' confidence and promote accountability."

The Mackinac Center's statement says the Montrose Community Schools in Genesee County and the St. Clair County Regional Educational Service Agency provided models for other districts to follow.

Checkbook transparency will join the Mackinac Center's Michigan School Databases, which provide revenue, expenditure and collective bargaining agreements for every public school district in the state.

The Mackinac Center said the website could save taxpayer dollars by allowing schools to shop for more cost-effective suppliers of goods and services.