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RCS first in county to upload check registry

by CHRIS GRAY
Observer Staff Writer

Romeo Community Schools has become the first school in Macomb County to post its check registry online for all to see.

Board of Education members have approved of placing the district's check registry, which shows how the school spends its money, on the Internet. The first registry was posted as of March 9 on the district's site (www.romeo.k12.mi.us) under the "Business Services" department.

"I strongly support this movement for transparency," said Jennifer White, secretary for the Board of Education. "We're working with tax dollars, so it's only right that people should see what we're doing with the money."

Talks of putting the registry online have taken place at the board for nearly a year, said White. In February, a motion was passed with a 4-3 vote, with trustees Terry Davis, Sue Hier and Sara Murray dissenting.

The decision was inspired by the "Show Michigan the Money" project from the Mackinac Center, a conservative free market think tank. The project calls for all schools to place their check registries in an accessible form on the Internet.

Romeo's posting comes just before Chippewa Valley which plans to post its registry this week, said Ken Braun, policy analyst for the Mackinac Center and director of the project. He said the center is hoping more schools will follow in Romeo's footsteps.

"There are plenty of reasons it takes a while to post it, like gaining approval or technology needs, but to take steps and do this, we can't ask for more than that," he said. "The default position of any government entity should be openness."

The information that is posted is accessible to the public with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), so the information should be made public anyway, said Vice-president Michael Stobak.

"The folks out there paying the bills want to understand what their money is going toward, and we should stand accountable and not shy away from questions in asking about money," he said. "Having the registry on-line will probably provoke more questions, but I think that is good."

Trustee Sue Hier said she believes people are entitled to the information, but hopes the information in the

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registry is posted so confidential information isn't given out.

"I'd feel uncomfortable if that happened, I'd be worried it'd cause a lawsuit," she said.

She added she had concerns about the Mackinac Center, saying there are entities like the state's Board of Education that should be and already make policies for school boards.

"It puzzles me that we have an organization we don't know very much about dictating policy, and are reluctant to reveal who they are," she said.

In trying to make itself transparent, the board also decided to make its subcommittee meetings open to the public.

The center is working on collecting all the registries and linking them on its Web page, www.showmichiganthemoney.org



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