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The Clarkston News



Phil Custodio
write the author

Online check info unlikely for local schools

June 10, 2009 - If residents of Oxford, Holly, and 36 other southeast Michigan communities want to know how much their school district pays for cell phone usage, milk supplies, or anything else, all they have to do is check their websites.

Clarkston doesn't offer that kind of online information, though the Board of Education will consider it this summer.

"We have nothing to hide - the more people know about how we operate, the better off we are," said Superintendent Dr. Al Roberts. "But we want to do it the right way."

For board President Stephen Hyer, the right way probably doesn't include online check registers.

"Just putting up account numbers wouldn't be very good," Hyer said. "I'd want to put more descriptive information so it is useful."

"We need to make sure the information is easy to get to and in context," Roberts said. "My concern is how the data doesn't tell the whole story."

For example, professional development might seem expensive on a check register, but is essential for highly qualified, teachers, he said.

"Frankly, it probably isn't as much as it should be to ensure education is the best possible," he said.

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thinktank based in Midland, sent letters throughout southeast Michigan in its "Show Michigan the Money" campaign. It calls for schools to post check registers and other financial information online to increase government transparency.

Clarkston's financial information is already available to the public, but the board will consider posting more information online, Hyer said.

"People are entitled to come in and look at the check register," he said. "The decision is still to be made by the board. We need to make sure it makes sense and is something comprehensible."

"There's no problem with publishing information, but in the right time frame and format," Roberts said. "The more folks know, the more respect we'll earn."

When considering online information, the school board will also examine features available in a district-wide software conversion, set for this summer, Hyer said.

Phil is editor for The Clarkston News. He is a veteran of the first Iraq war, having served in the U.S. Army.

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