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Four mid-Mich. school districts open books

by Midland Daily News

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Four more public school districts -- Gladwin, Clare, Frankenmuth and Coleman -- have joined a growing transparency effort by publishing their checkbook registers online, said Ken Braun, director of the Mackinac Center's "Show Michigan the Money" project. Braun has been encouraging all 551 public school districts, every charter public school, municipalities and legislators in Michigan to regularly provide this data on their Web sites.

"It's very simple," said Gladwin Superintendent Rick Seebeck. "It's not my money. It's the taxpayers' dollars. They have a right to see how it is being spent, and I have a responsibility to share it with them."

In Clare, local attorney Ghazey Aleck launched a Web site to push the school district toward transparency.

"I noticed a disturbing trend," said Aleck. "The school was holding kids responsible in the classroom, but they weren't being held accountable for their own actions."

His efforts paid off, and the district now posts expenditures on its own site.

With these additions, there are now 58 public school districts and two intermediate school districts statewide providing this information online, including half of the largest 20 districts. More than one in five public school students now attend a district that has an online check register.

"On the day after his inauguration, President Obama said, 'The way to make government accountable is to make it transparent, so that the American people can know exactly what decisions are being made, how they're being made and whether their interests are being well served,'" said Braun. "It's encouraging to see school districts in mid-Michigan, and throughout the state, fulfilling the spirit of this ideal."

Links to all school district checkbook registers open to the public are available at www.showmichiganthemoney.org/9329.

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