

Private school students should be treated fairly

David Maluchnik 10:52 a.m. EDT October 11, 2016

Every child deserves to be educated in an environment that is healthy and safe, regardless if they attend a public or nonpublic school. Funding in the 2016-2017 state budget assists Michigan in its responsibility to promote the general welfare of all students. A \$2.5 million appropriation will provide nonpublic schools with reimbursements for some 44 state mandates, including practicing safety and fire drills, conducting staff background checks, and maintaining attendance and immunizations records.

While the paper's Oct. 6 editorial claims such funding is unconstitutional, the general fund dollars appropriated by the Legislature cannot be used for religious instruction, curriculum, education or to "aid or maintain" nonpublic schools. This language is consistent with Article VIII Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution and the precedent set by the Michigan Supreme Court, which has upheld non-instructional funding for nonpublic schools.

This is not a public versus nonpublic school debate, so it is regrettable some have taken that adversarial approach. Protecting the health and safety of all school children is paramount. Other states, including Ohio, New York and Louisiana, have allocated significant funding to reimburse for student well-being. Michigan's appropriation demonstrates a legislative commitment that health and safety do not come at the expense of some students over others.

The state is on schedule to reimburse nonpublic schools for mandated expenses beginning next year. If the common good is to be advanced, all students should be treated fairly and society should have a collective concern for their needs, regardless of where they attend school.

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Michigan Catholic Conference, Oct. 7

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