

How to close — or not close a high school

Closing a senior high school because of declining enrollments and money problems is becoming one of the hottest topics among suburban homeowners.

Generally, they don't like to close any school — particularly one they had attended — and especially not a high school, with its strong community identification through its football and basketball teams, marching bands and spring musicals.

School board members and administrations don't like to even talk about the possibility of closing a senior high because they know it will generate a lot of emotional reaction, angry phone calls and possibly recall petitions.

Students don't like it for obvious reasons — it might mean a change of environment for them. It will force them to make new friends and form new relationships with peers, teachers and administration.

Closing a high school isn't much different than closing an elementary or junior high — of which dozens have been shut in our suburbs in recent years.

But the decision to close a high school isn't really an answer to the twin problems of declining pupil enrollments and increasing costs of doing business.

A high school shutdown is only one of numerous possibilities the school community should consider in the ongoing school financial crisis.

THERE ARE many other options — viable or not — that are open to board members, administrators, parents, and students.

It is to be hoped that time will permit school boards to look into the most-promising possibilities and give the community a choice to review.

The problem from the school board and administration point of view is: Should the school district operate the existing number of high schools after a 25-percent drop in student enrollment?

Many homeowners say public education is big business and should be run like a private, efficient business organization.

Does that mean that school boards should use a straight-line formula in closing high schools?

Maybe.

But let's take a quick look at the other options.

ADMINISTRATORS AND curriculum persons say that a high school with a small enrollment usually results in a down-sizing of special subjects and classes because there aren't enough pupils for one class to be cost-effective.

If a high school is closed, the pupils would be transferred to another building and the curriculum and course offerings would be substantially improved.

But is that really the case?

A teachers' union official in western Wayne



County said he taught in a small high school with about 800 students (well under the 1,500 to 2,000 found in most suburban high schools) many years ago and found a number of advantages.

One is that most of the students knew each other and the teachers and administrators knew the students.

"How about the curriculum program?" he was asked.

No problem. Instead of dropping a course forever, it was offered every other year so all students in a three-year high school career were exposed to the subject.

THERE ARE other options.

One is to use the high school targeted for closing as a special "magnet" center for special students,

either handicapped or those who excel in performing arts, academics, vocational/technical education, to name a few.

Another option is to close the junior highs instead and move the seventh- and eighth-graders into the senior highs.

When all is said and done, school boards should be sensitive to the public's needs — including students, parents, teachers and other school employees — to make sure that their views and needs are considered in the final decision.

Closing a high school — or any school — is not fun for anyone.

But there are ways to go about the decision-making process without it turning school board meetings into mini-civil wars.

The people closest to the problem — administra-

High school bands provide educational opportunities for students and plenty of color and excitement for parents, who listen to them at athletic contests and community events. But with the continuing problems of declining student enrollments and shrinking state aid, some suburbs are faced with the job of deciding whether to cut out extracurricular activities such as band or even close a high school. But school boards have other options. The basic policy choices boards face is should a building be kept open at the cost of curtailing student programs? (Staff photo)

tors, teachers, parents and students — should be involved in coming up with a recommendation or series of options for further action.

When the board ultimately makes its decision, it should have a detailed explanation of why and how it acted and what options were considered and rejected.

A school board decision to close a building isn't fun for anyone involved but it can be done in a professional, business-like manner and with sensitivity shown throughout the information-gathering process towards those affected by the decision.

If that is done, most persons in the community will probably accept the decision.

After all, they are the ones who will have to live the judgment long after board members and administrators are gone.

Daniels' den

by Emory Daniels

Government, industry are partners in providing jobs

Years ago there were jobs available for persons who wanted to work.

And then came the Great Depression and for the first time in our nation's history there were massive numbers of men who wanted to work but could not find jobs.

That situation was so unique that the federal government responded with large public works programs (WPA and CCC) to rebuild America using the unemployed.

Then World War II started, our economy recovered, and the unemployed were either drafted or hired by private industry to build bombers, tanks, etc.

The war ended, the quiet prosperity of the Eisenhower years followed, and unemployment roughly remained at what economists considered normal levels.

But the idea of using the unemployed for public works became well-entrenched in the public's mind and remains so up to today.

DURING THE '60s when the economy slowed an attempt of sorts to place the unemployed on government payrolls was made with the Peace Corps, VISTA, Job Corps, etc.

In the '70s the federal government seemed to recognize that our economy was cyclical, and every few years significant numbers of Americans would be without jobs.

And so 1974 Congress passed the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) which once again reinstated the idea of taking the unemployed and involving them with public works by placing them on the public payrolls.

A difference was that CETA attempted, in its language at least, to provide some kind of training so that when participants left CETA jobs they would be able to obtain employment elsewhere.

During the administrations of Nixon, Ford and Carter, CETA jobs increased in number year after year, partially because the unemployment rolls were increasing year after year.

In Michigan a lot of public improvements were done with CETA workers — rampgrounds were built, beaches improved, parks cleaned and refurbished, nature, bicycle and jogging trails built, etc.

In many ways, CETA was almost a carbon copy of the old CCC and WPA. The difference, though, was that the economy of the '70s was very different from the Great Depression. While massive numbers

were unemployed, by this time our workers had become adjusted to the cycle of layoffs and callbacks and were not "in shock" as workers were in the 1930s.

THE DIFFERENCE is that after the Great Depression the federal government and industry entered into an informal partnership to provide unemployment compensation.

There was a realization that many workers would become unemployed through no fault of their own and the security of the employee and his/her family would be jeopardized.

There also was a recognition, although maybe not spoken aloud, that unemployment would rise and fall and that the days of steady employment were in the past.

The idea of being jobless became almost acceptable for workers because industry and government were giving them money while they were out of work.

And industry shared the expense because they knew full well the day would come when workers would be laid off. In fact, establishment of unemployment almost guaranteed that layoffs would occur. In my opinion, the "solution" anticipated and predicted the occurrence of the problem.

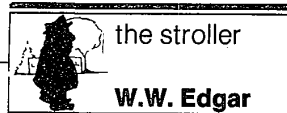
But most recognized that workers were being unemployed through no fault of their own and, therefore, government and private industry would try to respond to meet perceived obligations.

So now the feds are backing off on the CETA program and local governments, including those in Plymouth, are bailing out to avoid financial deficits in local budgets.

So the 1980s begin with government purposely getting out of the public works business. While there has been no clear national statement of what the unemployed will do, we have decided to eliminate public works and remove jobless persons from government payrolls.

We may not know as a nation what we are going to do with our jobless citizens. But we should recognize that the vast majority are unemployed because industry does not have jobs for all who want to work.

And if we cannot "blame" the jobless for their plight, then we should not try to "punish" the unemployed because they happen to be out of work.



The Stroller learns cooking while 'baching' it at home

In the long, long ago when The Stroller was still a chubby young fellow in corduroy knee breeches, he walked past the kitchen of our little home in the Pennsylvania Dutch country while his mother was giving his sisters a lesson in cooking on our old wood-burning stove.

As she spotted him, mother called, "Come on in here and join your sisters; you never know when knowing how to cook will come in handy."

At the moment she was explaining the use of the burners and how to make good use of them by moving cooking utensils back and forth. She was deep in her lesson when she said that when you didn't want things done too quickly, you put them on the back burner.

That policy still is followed today, for if you want things delayed a bit, the saying is that you put it on the back burner.

With the finish of that explanation, Mother went on to stress that you never attempt anything in the frying pan or the roasting pan until you grease it ever so lightly.

At the time The Stroller just smiled as he sat there drinking in the knowledge from a mother who was considered one of the best dutch cooks in the neighborhood. Little did he think that the day would come when the knowledge she was imparting would come in handy.

Because of a quirk of fate, that knowledge has been helpful on several occasions in the years that followed. And had it not been for his mother's lessons, he might have been in terrible straits.

Several years ago, Leona, his help mate, was confined to the hospital to have an artificial knee placed in her right leg. That meant The Stroller had to "batch it" for the length of her stay, and that was seven weeks.

For a day or two things seemed a bit strange. You see, his lessons were given on an old wood stove and now he was faced with a modern electric range. But the teachings of his mother soon came back and he managed to get along without the need of dining out each evening.

On that occasion he tried several old-time dishes. With the aid of Lady Luck, he managed to get by,

especially with the sea food dishes he prepared.

Now he is serving another term of "baching it" as Leona is confined to the hospital with what the doctor claims is the most severe case of shingles he has ever seen. That means he is back at the stove preparing his own meals. And what a change.

Things are so different now than when he was a student at his mother's cooking school. Most meals today come prepared in packages and it is ramshackle of the story they tell of the young fellow who was asked what his mother was having for dinner and he promptly answered, "Oh, she'll melt something."

But the other day he came across a surprise carton in one of our super markets. It was a package of what was labeled "baked clams." The Stroller took one look and his eyes must have popped when he noticed the clams were in their original shells.

When Mother made them we called them "deviled" clams and they were a choice dish. So The Stroller lost no time in placing the carton in his basket and dreamed of a meal that would be different.

It was. And as he sat there dining on a dish he hadn't tasted in years, the memories came of his dear mother, now long gone, preparing this popular dish, and what he feast he had all by himself.

But it was the teaching of his mother that morning in the long ago that even got him to trying to handle the kitchen range while serving his second term as a bachelor while Leona is confined to her hospital bed.



Did you know that if you catch a big enough fish in Michigan, you may win a place in the state's Fishing Hall of Fame? You will have to compete with the record 193-pound lake sturgeon, a 58½-pound lake trout, a 39-pound northern pike, a 28½-pound steelhead (rainbow trout), or a 40-pound, 15-ounce northern muskellunge.