

Solving big problems is best in small groups

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

Developing mass-transit systems, warding off computer invasion of privacy and developing alternate energy sources are a few of the problems a dozen Harrison High School students have toiled with all year.

They were participating in the state-wide future problem solving program which gives young minds a chance to work on adult problems.

The Harrison students, who were divided into three teams according to age, did well in a state future-problem-solving competition. Only 40 teams out of 400 in the state went to the state finals, and all three Harrison teams made the trip.

One Harrison team took a first at the competition, in which teams were rated on presentation and problem solving in the intermediate division, freshmen Eric Sandier, Stephen Miller, Margo Freedman and Mike Hack were first in presentation while finishing fifth in problem solving.

With their state-finals success, the three Harrison teams have also been invited by Gov. Milliken to attend a three-day summer conference on finding solutions for an inner-city mass-transit system. Some 25 teams from around the state will participate in that conference.

The concept of getting students as young as elementary-school age to tackle big problems was developed by Paul Torrence, now a professor at the

University of Nebraska. Future problem solving was introduced in Michigan schools two years ago.

"It's a five-step process of creative problem solving," said Jeanne Young, Harrison coach and English teacher.

"You start with a fuzzy problem and work it through to a final solution." FOUR MINDS are best for creative thinking, according to Torrence's concept, so each team has four members. Ideally, each member has different strengths, balancing logical, divergent and eccentric thinkers on each team. The trick is getting the personalities to click.

The teams tackled three practice problems this year. Scoring on the third determined teams chosen for the state competition.



Mike Mendelson (left) and Eric Sandier discuss the problem presented to them.



Jeanne Young coached Harrison

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