

Schools may face \$5-6M deficit



Last year's cuts in Farmington Public Schools budget may look like a walk in the park compared to the deficit officials face this year, according to Supt. Robert Maxfield. He said reductions will impact students.

BY JONI HUBRED
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It's time to batten down the hatches in Farmington Public Schools. Officials were told last week to expect the coming budget year to be a tough one. Declining state revenues, coupled with normal inflationary increases, could put the district's bud-

get as much as \$6 million in the red. Farmington, like other "hold harmless" districts, was allowed to continue a local levy when the state passed Proposal A and funding relied more on sales taxes than property taxes. An anticipated drop in tax revenues led Gov. John Engler to veto parts of a school funding bill in October. Districts were supposed to receive a

\$300 per student funding increase, which was then expected to drop to \$200 and now probably won't exist in any form, said Superintendent Robert Maxfield.

"Best case scenario, our revenues will be flat," Maxfield said. "There may be reductions."

To address a \$3 million shortfall last year, officials delayed maintenance, cut administrative positions and made other reductions that didn't have a direct impact on the classroom. This year, Maxfield said, they won't have those options.

"It's certainly the biggest (deficit) we've all faced," he said. "We're trying

to strike a balance between not panicking but not being Pollyanna-ish about what's coming."

Maxfield said a budget committee with administrators from all areas and the Leadership Council, which includes union representation, has begun meeting to discuss options.

The district has dodged bullets over the past few years, with increased enrollments and a greater-than-expected number of retirements, Maxfield said. He described last year's cuts as the "low hanging fruits," easy to reach.

"This year, it's going to be different," he said, explaining the cuts would likely have a direct impact on students.

Help sought for mission to Vietnam

A Farmington Hills woman will travel with volunteers who want to make a difference in the world, but first, she has to raise funds for the trip.

BY KEVIN BROWN
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Danielle Patterson, 20, has been looking for something meaningful to do, and she may find it in Vietnam.

The former Oakland Community College student from Farmington Hills plans in March to join five other team members headed for Vietnam, organized by the Institute for International Cooperation and Development.

"I've always wanted to do something like this," said Patterson, who works for a law firm weekdays and delivers pizzas on weekends. "I'm not ready to go back to school and I want to do something constructive with my life."

While Patterson attended pre-med classes at OCC, "I'm just not ready to make that commitment right now," she said.

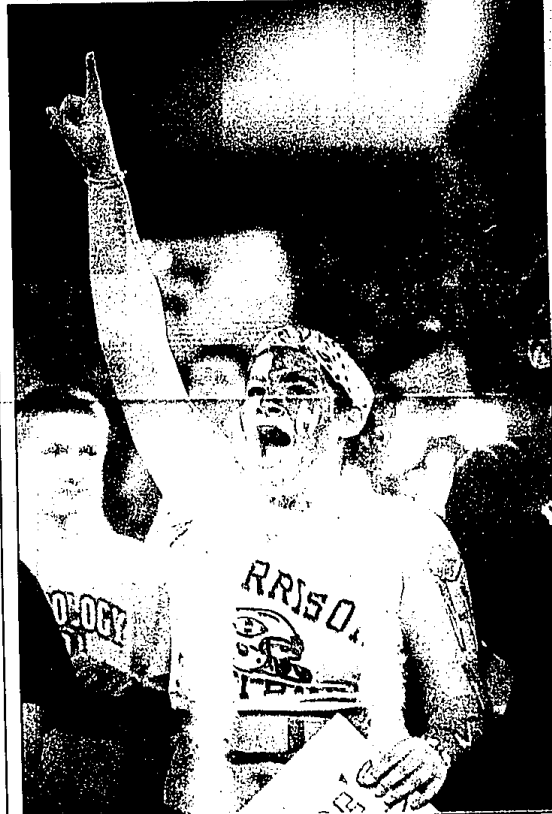
Patterson discovered the Institute on line, and started e-mailing staff. The group traces its roots to folk schools founded in Norway.

"They're all about helping out a little bit where people need it. You can learn from the world around you and have a more enriching experience."

Danielle Patterson
 —Volunteer

Please see TRIP, A2

Hawks on Top



No. 1 fan: Farmington Harrison senior Heather Sinawit cheers her football team on to victory over Fruitport in the Division 3 state final, held at the Pontiac Silverdome. The Hawks won their fifth consecutive state championship by a score of 28-6. The full story by Dan O'Meara is in our sports section, D1.

STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HAWLEY

IN THE PAPER TODAY

Holiday greetings: Card sales support a number of charitable organizations in our area. Learn more about how you can help by reading the story in our Hometown Life section / C1

Opinion: As they face a deficit and the potential for deep budget cuts, we urge the Farmington Board of Education to take their act on the road / A8

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Training Day: Police learn about other cultures

BY JONI HUBRED
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For more than a decade, diversity training has been a part of every Farmington Hills police officer's education.

What started with Chief Bill Dwyer's tenure has become an integral component in a department that serves an increasingly diverse community, said Commander Pat Brown.

The training, he said, is designed to make officers aware of different behaviors or customs in other cultures that could affect their encounters.

"A lot of our job is communication," he said. "The more information we can impart, the better."

Training officer Brian Bastianelli believes every officer should have a knowledge and awareness of diversity. "To be a professional, you have to

Please see TRAINING, A3

Area suburbs have experienced many challenges as a result of growing diversity. Communities are working to address concerns and encourage tolerance.



Neighborhood watch: Working together to defeat racism

BY JEFF COUNTS
 STAFF WRITER

As suburban communities in the Observer's coverage area have grown in size, they're also facing a growing diversity and issues of tolerance. Recently

in Canton Township, officials appointed a Human Relations Commission, after residents raised concern over the official observance of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. In Farmington Hills, an increasing diversity led to the formation of a Multicultural Multiracial Community Council a decade ago.

Based on recommendations from the Canton commission, the township's

board of trustees approved a unique proposal Tuesday that would close diversity training on the third Monday of each January.

But the MLK Day controversy was only the beginning of the Canton

Township Commission's work, said member Rev. Eric Moore.

"It will be a long-standing commission, but that was their first priority," he said. The commission has recommended the township observe the holiday.

"I wouldn't necessarily say there are any 'hot button' problems," he added.

Please see NEIGHBORHOOD, A3



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