

Board candidates sound off on the issues

Mervyn Ross

Dr. Mervyn Ross, 41, sees a challenge ahead for the Farmington School District, and he would like to be one of the board members meeting that challenge.

Ross, who is running for re-election in the June 14 contest, believes his "moderating" influence will aid in providing a better education for the district's students.

"My record demonstrates that decisions I have made have been in the best interest of the school population. I have made the time and given an honest effort as a board member," says Ross, who has served on the board since 1971.

He said the board's conduct in recent months has been an "unpleasantness" because of personal bickering; however, he added that his re-election would aid in combating that conduct.

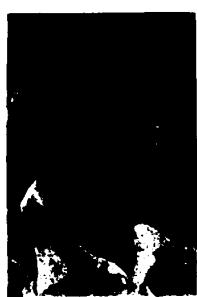
"I WILL TRY to keep this from getting worse. My actions and positions have demonstrated that I haven't been extreme," he says.

Ross especially is proud of the board's record while he served as its president.

"I was president during Farmington's first teachers' strike. We didn't find ourselves in a terrible circumstances. The board was prepared to stand by a schedule of time and dollars. We only had a two-week strike and the full school year was maintained," he said.

The strike, said Ross, was handled well by everyone including the board, administrators, parents and teachers.

He also believes the board did "marvelously" well in handling the busing situation by providing leadership and by keeping calm and peace in the community.



appearing on this month's ballot.

"There isn't any question that the dollars are needed to maintain programs, but it is important that the public has the opportunity to express itself on the issue," he said.

Ross expressed frustration by the state's refusal to fund programs without providing the funds to run them.

The mandate to provide textbooks and materials for all students is an example, he explained.

"The district still hasn't overcome the mandate," he said.

"We just don't have enough money. Each child should have access to textbooks for both classroom and home use. I can't tolerate education being the first thing to be ignored in the state budget and then having the state coming up with new programs."

To alleviate financial problems, Ross endorses passage of the 1-11 mill increase also

Helen Prutow

If elected, Helen Prutow will strive for better organization and performance on the school board.

"I feel the present school board is lacking in organization and that it needs long-range planning," said Mrs. Prutow, the president of the Farmington PTA.

"The board needs to set up a calendar. It needs to set deadlines, organizing what it has to do and when it wants to get those things done."

"As a board member, I plan to take a look at the coming school year and make some plans."

Issues such as the budget, school closings and the millage should have been reviewed earlier in the school year, she said. Trustees should have begun considering these issues sooner so that school doesn't let out for the summer without any definite decisions being made.

"One perfect example of this lack of organization and poor planning is the district's financial condition," said the 35-year-old mother of two Kentwood Elementary School children.

"The district will be in a financial bind for a long time. There isn't much of a chance to receive funds from the state. So we have to always going to the taxpayers with another millage. The board must make plans to cope with the problem."

IN THE AREAS of board policy and school programs, Mrs. Prutow plans to



keep a line of communication open.

maintain as many programs as financially feasible.

She intends to propose the expansion of the career education program, "even though the state demands it, but doesn't fund it."

"I also support decentralization of the Oakland Training Institute and its expansion into the Farmington district. This special education program would do a lot for the district's already great program," she said.

"Besides providing educationally equal programs for special students, it would help improve the district's image."

A five-year resident of Farmington Hills, Mrs. Prutow said her personal vote for the millage increase will be yes, although she disapproved the board's practice of announcing the request.

"I did take a stand once at a board meeting about the millage. I said I didn't think it had a chance of passing and that it would divide the community," she continued.

"It is strategically wrong. The board should have listened to its budget first. It didn't even have a budget when it announced the millage increase. So, in fact, it went before the public without something concrete for next year."

Larry Lichtman

The main theme of Larry Lichtman's campaign for the school board is that the educational programs within the individual schools are unequal.

There's out-and-out discrimination in the school programs. The programs at Harrison High School, for example, are much more comprehensive than those at Farmington," he says.

At Harrison, Lichtman says calculus and extensive language programs are offered. The same type of programs aren't offered at the other two senior highs.

"I don't see how the district can justify this imbalance. It's just not fair and something should be done to eliminate it at once."

"Who knows, the problem might even be worse at the elementary level." He feels this exists because the board leaves too many curriculum decisions to the individual building administrators.

"This must be changed somehow so there is a more equal distribution of program offerings at each school," the honor student says.

Lichtman believes he should be elected to the board because he has more knowledge than any other candidate as to what is going on in the schools and where the problems lie.

"The board needs more residents at its meetings. These residents must look at the budget and the board's plans to make sure it is moving in the right direction," he maintains.

"No doubt the board should be able to hold closed meetings. But I think the only thing we should talk about behind closed doors is contract matters."

Concerning the Farmington Education Association, the young candidate believes that teachers shouldn't have the right to strike.

"I oppose the right to strike and don't think the law should change because that would only encourage more teachers to strike," he says. "And that only ties up



he remarked that he didn't think the present board has met its responsibility.

the student's learning process. I don't like to see anything used as a bargaining power, either."

A primary concern that Lichtman thinks the board should deal with is a return to the basic, hard core academic programs.

"Students must learn to read and write properly. There are a lot of garbage courses in our schools now. The reason why so many students can't read and write is because the schools have been concentrating on these other courses."

"The district and board should concern itself with a more demanding curriculum."

"WITH THAT, we also should be more demanding on our teachers. Let's make them work harder and become better teachers."

On the pass-fail grading system, he says it makes no difference what was used for non-graduate students and he adds that it can't be instituted in academic programs.

"There is no way to effectively do it because the letter system is how colleges look at you. Eliminate grades and you eliminate your chances of getting accepted at a good university."

Concerning the millage increase on the June 14 ballot, Lichtman favors the board's request for more operating funds.

"The district claims the millage would have gone up at their present level if it passed. I'm not sure I would keep them at this level. I'm sure this will need other millage in the future because we should have room to expand programs."

In the area of budget cuts, Lichtman agrees with what the board has cut.

THE FIRST things the board usually cuts are those that hit closest to home, according to the former three-time district treasurer.

Rather, the board's first concern should be for students. Cuts should be made at central offices instead of in the schools.

When asked about long-range planning,

William Corliss

Faced with declining enrollments and the uncertainty of state funding, William Corliss said the Farmington School Board must improve its long range planning.

"It is difficult to plan programs when the district receives \$100,000 less than it did the year before from the state. With declining enrollments and reduced funding, it is hard to handle the district on a long range plan," Corliss explains. "But the board needs to make these long range commitments."

"I don't want to see the board take any short-term response that may in three or four years cause the district trouble or box us in," he continued.

Corliss, seeking reelection to the school board after serving a four-year term, will strive to establish better long range planning for the district.

To do this, he proposed the board develop more concise procedures and possibly conduct more study or planning sessions.

"Long range happenings will influence everything we do on a short term basis, so we must concern ourselves more with this activity," the incumbent said.

ON THE MILLAGE increase issue, Corliss thinks it necessary to maintain the program and he and the community want to see continue next year.

"I am also a taxpayer and have the



crossed public confidence and involvement in schools as an accomplishment he helped bring about in the district.

same problem as others. But I hope for the sake of the district, the community approves the increase," the 65-year-old local contractor said.

"I know what it means in money terms. If the people feel they can afford it and want it passed, then I hope it receives the same support the millage increase received last year."

But if the millage fails, Corliss said he would rather keep school programs operating and close schools to balance the budget.

Corliss, who classified himself a fiscal conservative and an educational liberal, favors maintaining and strengthening educational programs in the district.

"I don't want to eliminate specialty programs when we make cutbacks because of budget reductions," he added. "My voting record over the past several years proves that I am a believer of continuing board educational programs."

He believes that his past experience on the board has given him insight and background on all programs, and the understanding would help him make sound decisions when dealing with budget cuts.

Others running for the school board aren't as experienced in these areas, so their thinking might damage some of the district's programs," Corliss said.

THE PRESENT board president cited in

Budd Pickett

Returning credibility to the school board while eliminating personal discord among trustees is H. Budd Pickett's primary goal if elected to the Farmington School Board.

To accomplish this, he believes the board members should stop playing political games with the taxpayers.

He wants to maintain an open, honest relationship with the community and hopes to improve the board's integrity.

"I'm somebody who doesn't shoot," Pickett says. "If elected, I would serve as a stabilizing influence on the board. I don't represent any special interest group, and I would like to see the school board accomplish something beyond its continual request for money."

Long meetings and public demonstrations of conflict among board members is ridiculous, according to the 45-year-old West Bloomfield resident.

"I want to see this public discord going on at meetings end. To do this, I would strive to make the trustees stop making spectacles of themselves in public," Pickett continues.

"More than anything else, I want to make sure students get the best quality education we can afford without all the politics playing going on."

ON THE MILLAGE question, Pickett said he will support the 1-11 mill increase. He doesn't endorse, however, the method by which the millage issue was established at how it has been mishandled in his opinion, by the school board.

"By not establishing a budget or a back-up budget in case the millage failed before they considered the millage, the board did a great disservice to the community," according to the self-employed manufacturing agent.

"I'm not sure the district needs 14 mills, and I'm not sure that is what the community wants either. I don't know if the district just wants to continue its present programs, as would be the case if the millage passes, or make cuts across the board."

"There has to be some fat in the district's present budget. I think there are



several areas in which further cuts can be made.

"But I don't want to second guess the school board and the budget as it was voted on by the board. We should let it go. I explained the co-chairman of the 'Kids Own' millage committee."

If confronted with making budget cuts, Pickett supports belt tightening "across the board."

"The board should take a little bit from every area so that the cuts just don't affect one program. At least students will be getting something if and when a certain program is cut in half or reduced."

ANOTHER PRIMARY goal will be to keep as many of the district's teachers in the classroom and before the students as is financially possible.

Pickett said Pickett will strive to accomplish include:

- Making budget preparation easier and more comprehensive by establishing mandatory early budget studies.
- Improving correlation between primary and secondary classroom programs.
- An example of poor coordination is the elementary science program," he said. "Many junior high school teachers I have talked with are unaware of what the program is all about."
- Reimplementing and expanding the in-transit program in junior high schools.
- It is about time to start bringing athletics back into the school system. It should be looking into an enrollment continue to decline."
- It should be something more than an 11th hour decision, as has been the case in many years during the past several years. The concept should be looked at in other school districts to see how they have managed with it," explained Pickett, Franklin Valley Association president and treasurer.
- Regular meetings with date representatives are a must on Pickett's list. He believes trustees should travel to Lansing regularly to discuss problems with officials, possibly joining other districts to express a uniform voice of schools.

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