

Cut athletics, not academics, top students say

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

High-school athletics should be eliminated so that more can be spent on ailing academic programs, a group of Oakland County students contended.

"I'd rather see them (school administrators) cut athletics altogether and leave academics alone," said Ellen Sternhill, a West Bloomfield High School student.

A Troy student agreed. "We're worried about passing a millage, and the track and tennis teams just got new sweats. That's unfair."

"At Lahser we have intramural sports and regular sports. But we could get along just with intramurals that don't cost anything," a Bloomfield Hills female student said.

SOME 250 high-school students from across Oakland County exchanged ideas about academic life with one another last week in a one-day leadership forum. Sponsor was the Oakland Intermediate School District.

After six hours of workshops, where topics from "Survival Skills for Today's Teen-agers" to "Teacher Apartheid" were discussed, the students addressed a panel of state and local educators expressing their concerns.

They asked for straight answers to tough questions. They were told their opinions would be forwarded to the State Board of Education for consideration.

They wanted to know why property tax increases don't pass, why tenured incompetent teachers can't be fired and why there can't be a countywide district where all taxpayers put their money into one pot and have it divided equally among cities.

"PEOPLE COULD pay taxes on a percent-age basis of their property value," said a

'I'd rather see them cut athletics altogether and leave academics alone.'

— Ellen Sternhill,
West Bloomfield High student

Bloomfield Hills Lahser student. "If we were all in one district, it would be more fair. It's just not fair that if you live in a poorer district you have to suffer."

Panelist John Pagen, superintendent of the Waterford School District, responded, "I'd love to see distribution of money. But districts who've got money don't want to give it up."

received a round of applause when she asked, "Why, when layoffs occur, do older, incompetent teachers on tenure get to stay while the younger, more qualified teachers are laid off?"

Charles Williams, associate executive director of the Michigan Education Association, responded.

"Tenure is the most misunderstood concept. Tenure does not mean that incompetent teachers can't be fired. It means that they must be given a fair evaluation before they are terminated."

"As far as layoffs are concerned, they're related to seniority on a master list that was agreed upon in negotiations," Williams said.

TAX INCREASES were on all the students' minds, and they wanted to know why so many proposals fail in so many districts.

Betty Campion, board member of the Oakland Intermediate district, attempted to shed light on the question.

"People in various communities have to come to grips with the future of their children's education. They'll have to decide what they're willing to pay for. We've got a responsibility to educate every student in this state, and hopefully the public attitudes will turn around to recognize this," Campion said.

Guy Blackburn, who coordinated the program for Oakland Schools, said it was part of an outreach project to increase public awareness on public schools.

"If the students show support, we'll have another leadership day," he said.

When he asked for a show of hands as to how many students wanted future leadership days, more than 200 students raised their arms.

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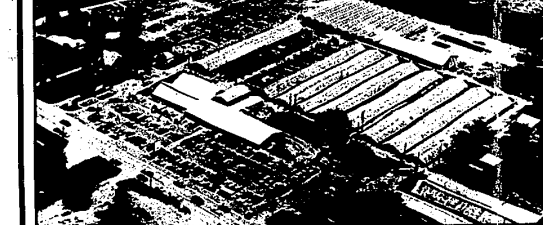
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