

Walled Lake nips program for the poor

Walled Lake School District's Head Start program, for preschool children in low income families, will be terminated in June, the school board decided last week.

Although solvent its first three years, the Head Start program was faced with financial difficulties this year. "Federal funding for Head Start has not increased, but program costs have," said Hugh Davies, director of elementary education.

Head Start is a 24-hour program four days a week for prekindergarten children. Program eligibility is determined solely on the basis of family income.

A morning and an afternoon program take place at Decker Elementary School, each serving 15 students. Dublin Elementary School holds a morning class, which also serves 15 youngsters. Davies noted that 120 children were eligible for the program this year.

AT LAST WEEK'S meeting, Davies asked the board for \$6,000 in general-fund dollars to support the program for the balance of the school year. The \$6,000 would cover a projected program budget deficit of \$3,000, a teacher salary deficit of \$700, an additional \$1,500 for supplies and about \$900 to restore the program to a five-day

week.

The board denied the request in a 5-1 decision with Trustee Bonnie Venzke voting no. Board President Mario Tozzi was absent.

Davies noted the budget shortfall was due to a decrease in 1984 federal funding. In June, the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA) informed the district it would receive \$41,240 in federal funding and \$13,146 in non-federal funding. This allocation left the program with a projected deficit of \$3,000.

SAMI ALAM, director of planning and evaluation, informed OLHSA the district could not absorb the shortfall, but the agency refused to reimburse the program for the difference between projected cost and its allocation of federal dollars.

In addition, OLHSA officials earlier this month said they could not allocate an additional \$1,000 to cover a shortfall in the budgeted amount for teacher salaries.

"When you look at the benefit of the program and the comprehensive manner in which it is implemented, this is a very nominal amount (to pay from the general fund)," OLHSA Head Start Project Manager John Coccione said in a letter to the district.

Geraldine Kelly, secretary to the superintendent, at the Board of Education Office, 20210 Middlebelt Road, Livonia.

Completed petitions are due back in Kelly's office no later than 4 p.m. on April 9.

Complicating the issue, Davies said, is the district's non-compliance with regulations from state Department of Social Services, requiring adult monitors on school buses carrying 4-year-old children.

Davies said the district tried to save money by having parent volunteers perform this task. However, their cooperation has not been consistent enough to satisfy the state, he said.

The district has been given 60 days to comply with the requirement.

Davies said he will ask OLHSA to provide the money to hire volunteers to monitor the three buses that transport Head Start children. If OLHSA will not provide the extra money, Davies said he will give parents the ultimatum of monitoring the buses or removing their child from the program.

If the latter recommendation does not meet state approval, OLHSA "may wish for us to excuse ourselves from the program more rapidly," Davies said.

VENZKE SUGGESTED the board fund the program for the remainder of the year with \$3,000 from the general fund to cover the program's projected deficit, but her motion died for lack of support.

"We need to address our priorities before we start committing funds," said Trustee Patricia Jackman, noting that federal funds for other programs also have been reduced, and there will be additional demands on the general fund if other federal programs are to be continued.

Jackman suggested the administra-

tion outline the financial state of all federal programs, expected decreases in federal support and potential impact on the general fund.

THE BOARD approved her recommendation 5-1 with Trustee Merlin Reeds voting no.

"With federal dollars diminishing, maybe we need to get out of these programs altogether," Reeds said.

"The federal government helped us

get all these programs started, now they're going to dump them on us," Trustee Kenneth Tucker said.

"After approving Trustee Robert Cooper's suggestion to continue the Head Start program in June — at no cost to the district's general fund, if possible — the board unanimously approved an allocation, not to exceed \$700, to cover the deficit in teacher salaries already incurred by the program.

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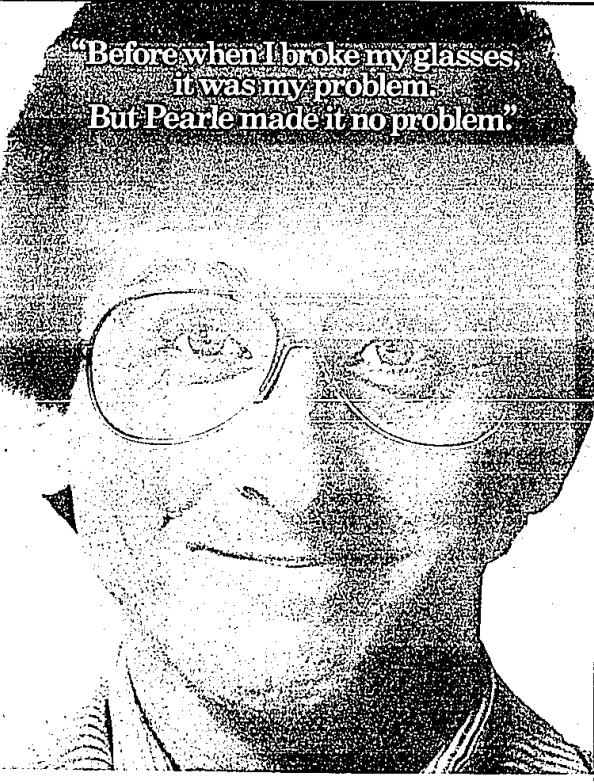
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