

Parents discuss program for gifted kids

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GIFTED PROGRAMS, Lewis said, usually take three forms:

- Pullout programs where children who have been identified as academically gifted are placed in special classes, or even in special schools. This method is little used in Farmington.

- Enrichment programs in which added course work or subject matter is added to what already is taught.

- Acceleration programs where gifted children are moved ahead by subject (a fourth grade student who is good in math might be given sixth-grade math to study), or by total grade.

"We try to provide a little of everything," Lewis said. "Call it a smorgasbord approach."

In the Farmington District, which at last count had 506 gifted students scattered throughout the schools, students enter the program on the recommendation of a parent or teacher and a high score on the Slosson Test, which supposedly determines a child's intelligence.

The district has a full-time gifted coordinator in Connie Mason. At the elementary level, where officials hope gifted children can be identified, each building has a person who coordinates the gifted program.

There are 14 instructors, none of whom are required to have any special training for gifted children.

"There's always the problem of talking about qualifications and certifications," Lewis said. "All our teachers are qualified to teach children."

WHILE SUPPORTING the concept of gifted education, Lewis said that special schools for the brightest children "goes against the grain of the American comprehensive system, which is primarily egalitarian — everyone has a right to attend and receive a free education within the mainstream of the community."

"Even with the handicapped, you'll find that one of the tenets is to keep the child in the least restrictive environment, which means in the mainstream, where all children live and work together. The same thing must apply to the gifted."

Lewis praised the Farmington program, in place for the past six years, as having "a fine staff and a very substantial curriculum."

"We can present the student with a high level of instruction if that student has the capability to do the work," he said.

Not all parents agree with Lewis' assessment of the program. Harper, for example, finds it "a minimal tip of the hat to the gifted," and "too conservative because the money isn't guaranteed."

ANOTHER PARENT, Nanette Sommers, whose daughter is in the Farmington program, added, "What they've set up here is a good idea. It's carrying through on the idea that they're having problems with."

"We've been in the district only a year, but from what I understand it's very uneven in the district. One school may have a good program. Another may have a bad one. It's highly individualized."

Some gifted children are discipline problems in the school — and sometimes that's because the child just doesn't fit into the "normal" classroom situation, parents claim.



Mary Ellen Toiwin helps run the gifted program at Farmington's Eagle Elementary School.

"When you have a child who is very bright, in a lot of ways he or she is like an adult," Harper said. "He or she is capable of viewing the elementary school as an adult world."

"The child doesn't want to be talked down to, or told to sit in the circle when he is doing something else and doesn't want his train of thought broken."

What's needed, Girschach, is "more understanding on the part of the

general education teacher that some children need more repetition or work in the classroom, some need less, or a different kind of work."

"Some of the discipline problems come about not because the children can't do the work, but just because they're bored ally."

ALL PARENTS interviewed agreed that instructors should receive training

— and become certified — for teaching the gifted.

"I've done some reading on the subject, and all the books seem to say that it's highly desirable for the teacher to have training in it," Sommers said. "I'm amazed to find that there are no state requirements for the gifted program. Obviously, it's something we're going to have to work for."

Added Girschach, "I'd like to see that happen, but it won't — not until there's

state-mandated gifted education."

Harper said that parents must lobby to Lansing for improvements. "We need the same kind of protected funding as the handicapped students have," she said.

Meanwhile, Farmington's Lewis stands by his idea of "mainstreaming" the children in the district's gifted program.

"We haven't tried to carve out an elite contingent of children or facilities," he said. "We're always being compared to (Bloomfield Hills) Hooper (the school Harper's son attends)."

"And it was asked at the board meeting, 'Why don't we have a place like Hooper?' I answer, 'Hooper is a different kind of school environment, as is (Detroit) Country Day School, as is the public school.'"

On this point, at least, Girschach agrees. "When someone asks that the public schools be Hooper, they're asking an apple to be an orange," she said.

WHAT ROLE, if any, should the Farmington Board play in effecting these changes — especially the certification of teachers of the gifted?

"I think it's a good thing to push for," said Trustee Janice Ralston, whose son is a high school senior at Hooper, at the last board meeting. "I think the time to fight for this is now."

But Board President Helen Fruen, cautioned, "It takes parents — not only the board of education — to take action and get that done."

A group called FACET (Farmington Association for Children with Exceptional Talent) serves as "a parent support group for children who have been identified as gifted," said Girschach, who recently was elected its president.

They prepare would-be graduate students

By Tom Henderson
staff writer

IT'S NOT UNUSUAL for students to start part-time businesses to help them through school. Steven Lemberg and Mandel Allwell thought they were doing just that seven years ago when they started counseling other students on how to take graduate-school entrance exams.

In 1977, Lemberg and Allwell figured such a counseling service was a nifty way to make a few bucks while at the University of Michigan law school. Today, they are 29, both have practiced

corporate law for several years, and both have decided that counseling students on entrance exams makes a nifty living. That what they went to school for seven years to do.

"Last year, I decided I really liked doing this better," said Lemberg recently from his offices in Bingham Farms. "I was young and single, and I figured if ever there was a time to give a shot, it was now. If this doesn't work out, I can always go back to corporate law and get a job."

"I needed to know. It was one of those things where inside you gotta know. It was important to me and so

far it's working out real well."

IT is the University Test Preparation Service Inc., which began almost as an afterthought seven years ago. After Lemberg and some of his friends passed their law school entrance exams, they thought there was a part-time living to be made from helping other students pass their exams.

IT CONTINUED as a part-time living even after Lemberg and gang graduated from Michigan, got jobs and went off into the world. Lemberg and several of his friends in law school had graduated from Southfield-Lathrup

High School and they found themselves back in the Southfield area. The testing service continued on a part-time basis, until a year ago, when Lemberg and Allwell, another Lathrup graduate, class of '72, decided corporate law wasn't really for them.

Corporate law had its rewards — money and travel (Lemberg spent time in South America on one assignment for Coopers and Lybrand, one of the nation's giant largest accounting firms) — but it didn't satisfy them.

"I like this a lot better than working for a corporate law firm," said Allwell, 29, who is single and lives in Lathrup

Village. "No. 1, it's a lot more relaxed atmosphere. There's not as much outside pressure. There's more personal satisfaction. You can see results. If you're a young lawyer for a big firm, you spend all your time working for another lawyer; you never see the fruits of your labor."

Corporate law is a different world. It's more structured and more pressured," agreed Lemberg. "I figured this is the time to get out and do what you want in the world. If I had been married, with kids and other responsibilities, I couldn't afford to do it. If I didn't try it now, then when I was 35, and then

40, there would have been some reason inside me always saying, 'You should have tried it, you should have tried it.'"

Lemberg is from a family of "go-for-its." His sister, Lisa, 25, who shares his house in West Bloomfield, is a graduate of Bennington College and plays bass guitar in a blues band. To help support herself, she works part-time in Lemberg's office and part-time in an art gallery in Birmingham.

The art gallery is the Canter-Lemberg Gallery, which his mother, Cora, Please turn to Page 4

Life on the rocks

By Tom Saer
staff writer

A pair of birds attempting to start a family has been a real traffic-stopper on a Farmington Hills driveway.

A female killdeer — *Charadrius vociferans* — laid four eggs among the stones of the gravel driveway at Bob and Betty Mullins' house on DeOrt back on May 23.

The small, brown-and-white bird and her look-alike mate have been noisily guarding their potential offspring ever since.

Anxious to help a struggling family, the Mullins placed the driveway off-limits to vehicular traffic for the duration by marking off a seven-foot section with logs.

"We can't get in and out of our own driveway," admitted Betty Mullins, who added that the family cars detour around the nest by driving on the lawn. "The milkman has to park on the street and carry the milk up. Same with the UPS truck."

The killdeer parents, marked by their long legs and black bands on their white breasts, spell each other on the eggs, Betty Mullins noted.

"Her and her mate take turns sitting on the eggs," she said. "They do a little chirping and then change places. I don't know how long the shift is."

While one bird sits, the other stays nearby, Mullins said. When disturbed, the one-sitting bird "flutters around and makes you think he is in-

jured," she said. "It's trying to distract you."

THE BIRD'S flying voice — a loud and insistent *kil-deeah, kil-deeah* — aids in identification, according to Mullins.

"They have real long legs, too, long and thin," she added. "I can't tell the difference between the male and female, but my daughter said that her science teacher told her that one has two black rings under the neck. The other has three."

The Mullins children, 4½-year-old Bobby and 7-year-old Kari, are keen on watching the visitors keep house on the stones.

"We've really enjoyed it," she said. "We thought it would be a good learning experience for the kids."

A third killdeer — an interloper — showed up one day not long ago and landed in a nearby yard. The other two flew over and ran it off.

"It was the only time both of them have been away from the nest at the same time," Mullins said. "It was quite a fight. They were fluttering around and chasing each other."

Wildlife isn't that unusual in that Farmington Hills subdivision. A stream crosses the street nearby and mallard ducks congregate.

Even if the killdeer chicks are successfully hatched, they may not have much of a future around the Mullins house.

"One of our neighbors has three cats," Mullins explained.



A killdeer, its black bands showing, guards its eggs (lower right) in a Farmington Hills driveway.

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