

Opinion

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Speak up

Your opinion is important

SOME SAY too little goes into redrawing school attendance boundaries — a practice that can strain friendships, break up neighborhoods and disrupt learning patterns during a youngster's most impressionable years.

Given that backdrop, Farmington Public Schools' Longacre, Woodcock, Larkshire and Gill elementary schools could face serious overcrowding should the current housing market surge in western Farmington Hills continue.

Says Assistant Superintendent Lawrence Freedman: "If boundaries are not changed, we can anticipate a projected increase of 106 students (at Longacre) over the next 3-5 years, indicating a need for a minimum of four additional classrooms." But there's a breaking point at which additional classrooms — regardless of whether they're portable or permanent — overwhelm a school's support programs and thus overextend its educational opportunities.

Similarly, a hasty shift in attendance boundaries can cause excessive riding time on the school bus, a factor that also can tarnish the learning environment.

TO HELP avert nightmarish student overcrowding, district officials are weighing a far-reaching package of options:

- Temporarily moving 70 students in an area bounded by Nine Mile and 10 Mile, Haggerty and Halsted from Longacre to Flanders while a new school is built in the Halsted-11 Mile area.

- Temporarily resigning all kindergarten from Longacre to Flanders while district growth patterns are studied.

- Installing three portable classrooms at Longacre while a new school is built or while an addition to Longacre is completed.

- Moving other Longacre students to Flanders, which can handle about 125 more students.

"One parent called the options 'Band-Aid approaches,' stressing the need for more permanent solutions. Several parents wanted their children to remain at Longacre because of the principal, Millie Bennett.

Make no mistake: revising school attendance boundaries to balance student enrollments usually involves an emotion-charged challenge.

But as Freedman perceptively notes, "We try to keep friendship patterns to-

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— Lawrence Freedman
assistant superintendent

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BECAUSE CONSTANT transfers can have a psychological effect on children, the study committee wisely isn't looking at transferring students who already have been moved twice.

Attacks on motives are as much a part of redistricting as right angles are of geometry. Study committee members are investing time in a project inseparable from controversy.

Clearly, now is the time for parents to speak up. Parents who neglect to speak their mind should expect little sympathy after new school attendance boundaries are adopted.

Given the personal nature of redistricting, the school board should take extra care to consider parental insight and impressions.

A pointed give-and-take now should help shake down the study committee's pending recommendations — and should help bare obvious inequities.

ONCE SCHOOL attendance boundaries are changed, children have a right to expect inspired orientation to help ease the transition to a new school.

That's why it's incumbent on the school board to assure the orientation plan is both sensitive and workable.

Despite the heatedness of many redistricting debates, one thought always radiates through: jagged lines on attendance boundary maps neither provide substance to a school nor ultimately shape its destiny.

But challenged students, innovative teachers, flexible administrators and open-minded parents do.

— Bob Sklar

School teachers — helping mold future

THIS WEEK, Americans in cities and towns across the country will be honoring those who are shaping the future — our nation's school teachers.

National Teacher Day takes on special significance because the spirit of the outstanding New Hampshire teacher astronaut, Christa McAuliffe, is still so much with us.

Christa represented the very best of our profession. Vibrant, upbeat, energetic, courageous, she was full of enthusiasm for teaching and for life. Her dedication to her students and to her profession touched American hearts.

This is the time to recognize the thousands of Christa McAuliffes in classrooms everywhere, the teachers who are encouraging children and making a difference in their lives.

Each day, teachers in schools as different as large urban high schools and rural, one-room school houses are helping students explore new ideas, master new knowledge and skills.

Teachers are reaching out to every student — regardless of ability, regardless of interest in learning, regardless of social or economic background. They are striving to help all children realize their potential as worthy and effective members of this democratic society.

More and more Americans, I believe, now understand that teaching is both a science and an art. More and more Americans are understanding how very complex the teaching-learning process is.

We welcome this new understanding. We've clearly gone beyond that old idea that those who instruct and care for our nation's children just aren't quite as knowledgeable, quite as professional, as

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— Mary Hatwood Futrell
NEA president

those working in other professions. Christa McAuliffe's inspiring example has helped change this misperception.

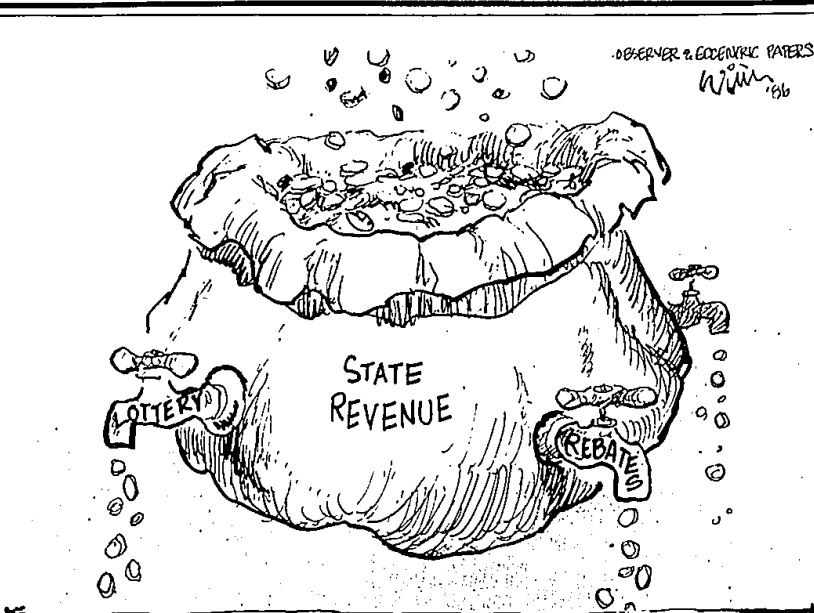
Christa also reminded America that education belongs in the forefront of any plan for the future, because education and learning are uniquely about the future.

Among all of us who work in America's classrooms, there's a renewed spirit of pride in our profession. We can feel the respect and confidence we have gained — from our students, from parents and from our communities. That's why today, all across the nation, so many of my colleagues are proud to say, "I'm a teacher, too."

A fund to honor Christa McAuliffe by providing grants to aspiring and practicing teachers has been established. Tax deductible donations can be sent to: The Christa McAuliffe American Education Fund, P.O. Box 0149, American Security Bank, Washington, D.C. 20055.

— Mary Hatwood Futrell

Mary Hatwood Futrell is president of the National Education Association.



Balanced-budget games

THOSE STILL bleating for a federal "balanced budget" amendment ought to learn a lesson from Lansing.

The lesson is that a constitution should be a framework of government, not a repository of economic details.

Michigan politicians are embroiled in a dispute over whether the state collected too much income and single-business tax money. Under the 1978 Headlee tax limitation amendment, excess taxes are supposed to be returned to those who paid 'em.

It sounds nice as economic policy, but it's bad constitutional law. The Court of Appeals may have to be called into the fray.

PONDER THESE details:

- The state collects millions through the lottery but returns half of it in prize money. What do you count as "revenue" — the entire lottery proceeds or the half that is kept by the Treasury for benefit of our schools?

- The state places a 7 percent tax on oil and gas found in Michigan and uses the money to acquire parkland. One side doesn't want to count that as revenue;



Tim Richard

the other side does.

That's just one set of arguments.

DEFINING "REVENUE" becomes even trickier when you shift to the federal budget. There are just too many ways to manipulate the numbers.

Suppose the Congress decides to beat the balanced budget amendment by splitting expenditures into operating and capital costs. Corporations do it all the time.

For example, our clever congressmen could say air bases, big dams and interstate highways are capital investments and can be financed with borrowed money. Such financing is perfectly logical and could easily defeat the purpose of a balanced budget constitutional provision.

Another trick is to have fun with "contingent" expenditures. You've never heard of those? Well, a loan guarantee, like the feds gave Chrysler, or farm loan

guarantees are examples. Do you count that as spending even though a check never is written?

Suppose the amendment allows an unbalanced budget in time of war. What's a war? Was the Korean conflict, where there was never a declaration, war? How about our activities in Vietnam, again without a declaration? Or Grenada?

In the 1930s '40s and '50s, Social Security was a separate trust fund and not part of the operating budget. What's to stop Congress from going back to that kind of "off-budget" spending plan?

AN ACCOUNTING whiz could list reams of tricks the folks in government might play, but by now you should get the point.

It's going to be impossible to write a workable federal balanced budget amendment.

A Republican named Lincoln said we should be reluctant to clutter up the Constitution with amendments.

A Democrat named Muskie elaborated: "We don't need fiscal handcuffs to wipe the deficit out. We need fiscal discipline. If we have that will, no formula is necessary. If we don't, no formula will work."

Whispered failure haunts us

THE DEBATE BETWEEN the Detroit NAACP, city of Dearborn officials and suburban mall developers really is the story of how a dream has turned into a nightmare of fear, cultural ignorance and bigotry.

For just a moment put park restrictions, boycotts and suburban shopping malls to the back of your mind. Today, we're talking about a massive social failure in America.

Eliminating a social crisis would be a simple matter if all we had to do was build another shopping mall.

But no such luck. This controversy uncovers an uncomfortable truth — integration in America has failed.

And while many civic and business leaders talk economics, they're really just skirting the issue. But then, most of us are still only whispering.

Let's face it, to proclaim loudly and clearly that racial integration has been rejected by a majority of society is frightening enough. The consequences of such a mentality is, frankly, unimaginable.

Any social scientist would be hard-pressed to cite even one American city or metropolitan area that has integrated. And the Detroit metropolitan area is in far worse shape than we care to admit.

What we hear civic leaders tell us is that a boycott won't work.

But what we hear whispered is that



crackerbarrel debate
Steve Barnaby

many suburban whites are delighted that fewer blacks are showing up at the malls.

What we hear business leaders tell us is that "conditions" for a major mall in Detroit just aren't feasible. What we hear whispered are the voices of fear from those who are just too frightened to go downtown.

FOR THOSE OF US Detroiters who have lived the roller coaster existence — from riots to resurgence and back to retrenchment — we mourn the division that haunts this area.

We mourn that metropolitan Detroit has grown into a scattering of enclaves — blacks divided against whites, poor against rich, power against pawns.

Maybe a mall in Detroit is impossible, but the excuses we hear from the experts are impossible to believe.

For years we've been told that a mall in Detroit would only succeed if more people lived downtown. But remember when Westland Shopping Center was construct-

ed — in the middle of an empty field without a subdivision in sight.

We hear that parking is too expensive. But that doesn't stop the thousands who go to Greentown or Cobo or Joe Louis Arena every week.

Others tell us the river acts as a barrier. Sure just like Lake Ontario is a barrier for Toronto or the empty fields north of Northland were barriers when that shopping center was built.

Still others say that Detroiters' income level is too low to support a mall. But really now, folks living around Southland fare about the same.

NO, THE REALITY IS that we are living in an area where people fear one another — so much so that they no longer care to shop together, let alone live on the same block.

To survive this crisis, and it is just that, we must escalate the dialogue. Civic, political and business leaders must act more responsibly in facing this issue.

The decision makers in our society must be willing to make decisions which will break down these walls of fear, misunderstanding and prejudice.

In short, blacks and whites at all levels must sit down and start talking about what really is on their minds. Blacks must tell whites about their fears and resentments and their cultural aspirations, which whites must learn to understand.