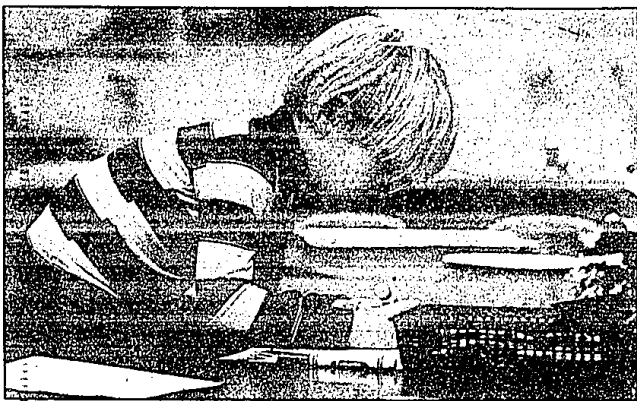


Developmental kindergarten helps kids cope



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Cooper Phillips draws a picture in the developmental kindergarten class at Fairview Early Education Center.

Continued from Page 1

One California educator estimates one-half to two-thirds of children attending primary and elementary schools are overplaced and should be in lower grades.

Other variables — including the increase in working mothers, one-parent families and an increase in preschool-age children — contribute to the way our children are being raised and taught, experts said.

The basics of reading, writing and arithmetic — taught in the first grade 15-20 years ago — have seeped into today's traditional kindergarten programs. This has created a group of children with special needs who are not ready to compete in this "new kindergarten" of structured learning.

For this group, a new form of kindergarten, with a developmental approach, is being adopted in school districts across the country. It's now in its third year in Farmington. Its purpose is to give "a gift of

time," according to parents who maintain it has enhanced their children's self-confidence and self-esteem.

The Farmington school district's Early Fives developmental program began three years ago with 66 children.

The adoption of an official program followed unstructured group efforts by parents who knew their children were not ready yet for today's kindergarten, said Mary Lou Somerville and Richard Rutter, supervisors in the early childhood program for Farmington schools.

Nearly 10 times that number — 664 — still attended traditional kindergarten when the Farmington program began.

THE FOLLOWING year saw an increase in the new program, with 88 attending developmental and 730 enrolled in traditional. This year lists 133 enrolled in developmental and 763 in traditional programs, according to district statistics.

The district has eight classes and

four teachers in two buildings today.

"It was an outgrowth really of the whole Early Childhood Center philosophy," said Lynn Nutter, an assistant superintendent for Farmington Public Schools.

Farmington has two Early Childhood Centers, Alameda and Fairview, which work with children from birth through the developmental kindergarten programs in a variety of programs.

Traditional kindergarten programs are still housed in individual elementary schools, but Farmington is considering changing that.

To encourage the type of "fun learning" curriculum early childhood experts want to see returned to kindergarten, an Early Childhood Task Force is working within the district. That task force is studying whether to move all kindergarten programs to Early Childhood centers and away from the elementary school settings, Nutter said. The task force also is studying whether the district needs a third center.

THIS TASK force was renewed after an extensive early childhood study done last year. The six-member committee called for making the Early Childhood concept separate, but equal, to elementary, middle school and high school levels of education. They recommended last spring that Farmington include kindergarten in the Early Childhood Education centers, that kindergartners be allowed a voluntary extended day.

The district acted this year to allow more children to attend the Early Fives program by allowing the half-day developmental kindergartners to be bused to school — for both morning and afternoon sessions.

Although the decision to place children in a developmental program such as Early Fives is made by parents, all students of traditional kindergarten age are tested each spring in the Farmington schools, and then recommendations are made by staff members.

Youngsters are given the Gesell Developmental Screening Test. Instituted by Arnold Gesell, propo-

nents believe children are unready for a traditional school until attaining certain levels of emotional, social and biological development, according to information from the Gesell Institute.

The tests involve primarily eye-hand coordination and verbal tests, the information said. "These tests tell us the age level at which a child responds to simple act tasks."

THE GESELL testing method is controversial nationwide, said Joan Lesca-Firestone, Early Childhood Consultant for Oakland Intermediate Schools. The final score used for recommendations is a combined average of the areas tested — the areas are not viewed individually, she said. After Farmington staff teams administer the tests, they may recommend a child be placed in the Early Fives program. Parents then must decide whether to follow the recom-

mendation or place the child into traditional kindergarten.

As these testing programs are reviewed for preschool-age children, educators are looking at a myriad of studies and some grants to help local districts make decisions.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children published a position paper in September debating how young children are taught today and making recommendations to take away the pressures.

In November, the Michigan Board of Education awarded more than \$20,000 to districts that are starting early childhood pilot programs.

Fifteen early childhood projects that received money in the 1985-86 school year also received \$500,000 this year for on-going programs.

Next: How the program works — teachers talk about the Early Fives program.

on the agenda

Agenda details for government meetings scheduled this week follow. All meetings are open to the public:

Farmington Hills
City Council
Council Chambers
31555 11 Mile
7:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 19

Public hearings are scheduled to discuss the following:

• Rezoning from RA-1 to OS-1 for property at 26500 Halsted, between 11 Mile and Howard Road. Proponent is Marion Wallace.

• Rezoning from RA-1 to RA-3 for property north of 10 Mile, east of Orchard Lake Road. Proponent is James Burroughs.

• Rezoning from RA-2 and OS-1 to B-3 or ES and OS-4 for property on the south side of 12 Mile, east of Orchard Lake Road. Proponent is Robert Dykstra.

• To determine the need for road and drainage improvements on Goldsmith, Eight Mile to the northerly end of supervisor's subdivision No. in Section 8.

• Consideration of a proposed vacation of sanitary sewer easement previously recorded on property in Section 15 for Orchard Ridge office building at 32605 12 Mile.

• Proposed text amendment for major road frontage options.

• Proposed text amendment for general exceptions height limit. The proposed amendment would allow skylights to exceed the maximum height limit with conditions and amend the cupola standards.

• Consideration of ordinance enactment and authorization to execute the warranty deed transferring parcels to Caddell drainage district. In other business, the council will consider approval of a resolution authorizing Haggerty Road water and sanitary sewer payback agreement.

Farmington City Council
Council Chambers
23600 Liberty
8 p.m. Monday, Jan. 19

Council members will discuss a \$450,000 loan to the city's downtown development authority tonight.

Also on the agenda is consideration of an amendment to the city's cluster housing ordinance, which would make the cluster setback similar to the one presently used for single family residential housing. This issue was discussed during last week's planning commission meeting.

Another upgrade to the 47th District Court's computer system will be considered by the council. Other items to be discussed include:

• taxicab licensing for 1987,
• building permit fees — a decision requested by the council,

• restaurant seating for the Baker's Loaf, a new restaurant to be located in the Village Commons,
• correspondence regarding the Boys State program
• Secular/centennial ceremony information, and
• request for a proclamation for Joyce Week.

Farmington Board of Education
Lewis Schulman
Administrative Center
32500 Shawwassee, Farmington
7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 20

During this study session, trustees will hear presentations from the district's community relations committee and an update on personnel department activities.

Also on the agenda is information from a districtwide Michigan Secular/centennial Committee on activities at various schools. The Farmington Kiwanis Club will present a flag commemorating the state's 150th birthday to the district.

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