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—Kenneth Erickson
Redford Union Superintendent

Opinion

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Birmingham Superintendent

In-formula

Equity at issue

NOTHING IS so powerful as an idea whose time has come, and it's the hope of educators around the state that the need for a new and equitable system for funding public education is an idea whose time has indeed come.

It's a simple concept, but one that has eluded us for years in Michigan. With our almost total reliance on local property taxes as a basis for public school funding, we have created a system that allows some districts to have vast sums of money for various programs, while others have a difficult time funding the most basic of programs.

The difference is, of course, the difference in property wealth, and those districts with an extensive property wealth have great financial advantages over those that do not.

The state tries to reduce the difference between property rich and property poor districts through a general state aid program. The trouble is that in spite of its best efforts over the years there has not been enough money available to achieve equality and the differences among districts are getting greater.

REDFORD Union Schools, for example, is a property poor district that had a per pupil tax base in 1986-87 of \$38.781. This compares with its school district neighbors who had per pupil tax bases of \$182.295; \$121.440, and \$107.191 in that same year.

Because of its low tax base Redford Union received general state aid. The combination of general state aid and local tax revenues provided \$3,011.02 per pupil for the 1986-87 school year.

The neighboring districts because of property wealth, did not receive general state aid, but depended exclusively upon local property taxes for the operation of their district. Their local property taxes alone were able to provide per pupil revenues of \$5,893; \$4,025; and \$3,773 for their districts respectively.

The irony is that the property tax rate (36.9 mills) paid by residents in Redford Union was higher than that paid by any of their neighbors in the other three districts. However, the dollars available for education programs, even when combined with state aid, were substantially less.

If Redford Union had the same dollars available per pupil as was available to its neighbors, the district's budget in 1986-87 would have increased in one instance by \$18 million, and in the other by \$6.4 million and \$4.6 million.

Such increases would have permitted the district to restore a full six-hour day at the junior high school (cut back to five hours in 1981), to secure a full art, music and physical education program at the elementary level (reduced in 1981), buy needed equipment and materials, repair all roofs throughout the district, lower class sizes at all levels, and, in

general, experience the benefits that property rich neighboring districts have always enjoyed.

It should be said here that we in Redford Union are very happy for our neighbors, although we're admittedly quite envious also. Their districts are funded the way that all districts should be funded. It is our hope that one day soon we'll all enjoy the same advantages that they have.

Actually, the present state aid formula, if sufficiently funded, could achieve equity. This was pointed out by Dr. Allan Odden of California, a school finance expert and consultant to the Michigan School Finance Commission.

However, there is a question whether there are sufficient funds available to the state to achieve equity through the present state aid system. And if equity cannot be achieved through the present system then a solution to our dilemma must be found by some other means.

This may have included the redistribution and sharing of the wealth generated through the state by industrial and commercial properties so that all districts, and all children, receive benefits from these resources. The issue is one of equality of opportunity and basic fairness for all children.

There are many programs being offered in Lansing as legislators and others attempt to reduce property taxes and bring about fairness in school funding.

SEVERAL proposals suggest an increase in the Michigan sales tax in order to replace money lost through reduced property taxes. This, of course, requires a vote of the people and it's very questionable whether such a vote would succeed.

Several proposed plans include redistribution of industrial and commercial income through one means or another. In the absence of any new money available to fund schools, this seems almost inevitable, and, in the view of many, desirable.

Suggested also has been a plan whereby an equal sum of money would be distributed to all districts throughout the state for the operation of schools. Such a plan does not take into consideration that there are vast differences in the cost of doing business from one area of the state to the other and this would itself be unfair.

The development of a plan to equalize funding for education will be a very difficult process. The issue, however, is too important not to be undertaken. Equal opportunity for all children is in fact an idea whose time has come, and when we do finally achieve it all of us in Michigan will benefit.

Dr. Kenneth Erickson has worked in the Redford Union Public Schools for 33 years — the last seven of those as superintendent of schools. He holds a master's and doctorate from the University of Michigan.

School funding: separate and unequal

The quality of a public school student's education may be greatly enhanced by his or her address. Michigan school districts in property-rich areas sometimes have two to three times as much to spend per student than do less affluent school districts.

A desire to equalize spending throughout the state gets widespread approval in theory, but wealthier districts balk when proposed solutions suggest lowering their expenditures in order to spread the wealth to other districts.

Wealthier districts say the solution is to find other revenue sources, such as increasing the state sales tax, in order to raise others to their level. Less affluent districts say it is unlikely that voters, already wary of high property taxes, will approve any substantial tax increase. In that case, a redistribution of the wealth is the only other alternative.

KEY TO THIS debate is the state's formula for funding schools. The formula guarantees a set number of dollars per student, per mill of tax levied by the district. If property taxes don't generate this minimum level, then the state makes up the difference with state aid payments. If the taxable value of property in the district (divided by the number of students) exceeds the minimum guaranteed by the state, the school is an out-of-

formula district and receives no state aid; but, because of high property values, is better funded than in-formula school districts.

On today's Observer & Eccentric editorial page, two superintendents look at the school funding dilemma: Roger Garvelink of Birmingham Public Schools writes from the perspective of an out-of-formula school district; Kenneth Erickson of Redford Union schools represents in-formula school districts.

District	Dollars/student
□ Birmingham	6108
□ Bloomfield Hills	5872
□ Southfield	5606
□ Farmington	5091
□ South Redford	4531
□ Livonia	4353
□ West Bloomfield	4291
□ Walled Lake	3874
□ Troy	3857
□ Wayne-Westland	3723
■ Garden City	3703
■ Redford Union	3605
□ Avondale	3586
□ Rochester	3371
■ Plymouth-Canton	3228
■ Clarencerville	3158
■ In formula □ Out of formula	

Source: Michigan State Board of Education
Figures for 1985-86 school year

Out-of-formula

Pay for quality

BIRMINGHAM CITIZENS have a social conscience. We do care about other students in the state. We firmly believe that the best way to ultimately strengthen our state, our economy and our quality of life is to strengthen our system of public education.

We are an out-of-formula district. Our citizens' state income taxes support other education systems, not ours. We are not complaining. Many of us do not qualify for the Home-Stead Act. We are not complaining. We pay per capita high sales taxes. That money does not support our schools. It supports other school systems. We are not complaining.

What we are complaining about and what we are extremely concerned about is any suggestion that we cannot continue to provide the quality of education for our students as we have in the past, as we are presently and as we feel we will be able to do in the future with our own resources as we simultaneously assist others.

EVERY STATE needs lighthouse districts. We have worked diligently to not only provide the very best of educational opportunities for our own students, but to share our experiences, our research, our successes with others.

We are privileged to have the resources to respond to the needs of others. We accept this responsibility with great seriousness and humility. We do not expect compensation for our time. We are pleased to be able to help.

Let's look at per pupil cost. Yes, we are one of the very highest in the state. We do not apologize for that. We wish for every student in Michigan to have the same opportunities. However, our per pupil cost is not exactly as you may first think.

Last year we had 7,500 K-12 students. We also had more than 76,700 registrations in community education. In addition, we accommodated more than 10,000 college and university registrations. We actually ran a small college. We provided space and underwrote a large part of the cost for a senior citizens center. We paid the salary of the gerontologist-coordinator. We provided space for the Meals on Wheels program, and coordinated hundreds of other services: daily social activities, trips, social worker services, income tax service and on and on for more than 1,100 seniors.

As a school district, we initiate training sessions and leadership forums for the community. We have an important national role in the parent involvement movement.

We are privileged to do these things, but the point is this: As a pub-

lic school system we have stepped up to meeting the needs of a community. If we did not do these things that is, create a learning community, others would have to do them and probably at greater cost to the taxpayer. It happens that in Birmingham they show up as per pupil cost.

HAVE WE BEEN fiscally responsible? I'm sure we have been. Our salaries are not as high as many. In fact, our teacher salaries are not as high as a number of in-formula districts. Our resources are directed at students and the community as much as possible.

Let us deal with the myth that Birmingham students are all from wealthy families, are raised by nannies, have trust funds and drive Porsches to school. Absolutely not true. We have many wealthy families. It is true. We also have many families, more than generally recognized, which are poor by common definition.

So why are our test scores so consistently high? They are right at the top in the state. The socioeconomic demographics would indicate that we should not score so high, but we do. We do because we have the resources for remedial reading teachers, counselors to deal with potential dropouts, a personalized curriculum if you will.

But at least as important, we have tremendous parent and community involvement and support.

ANY LEVELING of our resources will destroy much of that involvement and commitment which we have nurtured so carefully. The school system will be less our system. Local control is important to us. We feel we should be able to continue to provide that level of services to our students. We want to help others, too, but taking it from Birmingham and other districts like Birmingham is not going to make the impact we need.

The Number One goal of the Michigan Out-of-Formula District Association is to bring more money into the educational system. Again and again we have spent our time and considerable resources working on legislation and bringing about changes that have benefited only in-formula districts and students.

We need statesmen who will fight with determination to make the Birmingham experience available to all students. Our taxpayers are willing to pay more for quality.

Dr. Roger Garvelink has been superintendent for Birmingham Public Schools since 1978. He is also a former high school principal and assistant superintendent for the West Bloomfield school district. He is chairman of the Michigan Out-of-Formula District Association.

21st district race

Her job saving is cue to voters

THERE IS JUST ONE real issue in Tuesday's election for the 21st Oakland County Commission District seat. That issue is who will do the best job of representing the district, which includes 17 Southfield precincts south of 10 Mile and four precincts in Farmington Hills.

The person elected has a tough act to follow. Alexander Perinoff, who

died in August, was respected for his work as a commissioner. His successor will serve out the remaining year of Perinoff's term.

Experience and understanding of the job give the edge to Democrat LILLIAN JAFFE-OAKS. A former Southfield City Council president, Jaffe-Oaks pledges to work hard at being a liaison with state and local governments. If successful, her role could have a significant effect upon public services in the region.

Jaffe-Oaks has time and interest to contribute to the job, and the self-confidence to admit when she needs to do more research on issues. Voters can expect to receive full value in return for votes cast electing LILLIAN JAFFE-OAKS to represent the 21st District.



Lillian Jaffe-Oaks
voters' best choice

If successful, her role could have a significant impact on public services in the region.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Tree lighting is memorable

To the editor:

Parents who deery overcommercialization of the holiday season should plan next year to bring their offspring to the tree-lighting ceremony sponsored by the Farmington Area Jaycees at the Farmington Historical Museum.

Of the several hundred who sang carols and gloried in the sparkling lights on the 15-foot spruce Sunday night, Nov. 22, more than half were

youngsters.

Their eyes were large as they mingled in the crowd on the lawn, held flickering candles, and were themselves warmed with hot chocolate.

Farmington's roots go deep, and fortunately are those of us who live close enough to thrill once again to the coming of the holidays as portrayed at the museum.

The joy of community was thick

enough to cut that Sunday, thanks again to the Jaycees, the museum folk, and the wonderful tonality of the North Farmington High School chorus.

Fortunate indeed are the Farmington youngsters who do not have their holidays bounded by the nearest shopping mall.

Jean M. Fox,
Farmington Hills

Hotel's staffers very helpful

To the editor:

Michigan Fashion Exposition is a trade market show for the women's fashion industry.

Our manufacturer's reps will bring their new season's samples to a hotel room, set up a temporary showroom and set appointments with buyers for stores within that territory to come and view their lines.

Our first market was held Nov. 8-

10 at the new Radisson Suites Hotel in Farmington Hills. We originally booked this market in May, when we looked at blueprints and went on a construction tour.

The reality of the hotel surpassed our fondest hopes. The setting was luxurious and lovely, the rooms extremely comfortable.

But the best part of the hotel is their staff — their smiles, willing-

ness to be helpful and general atti-

tude made being at the Radisson Suites a delight.

Were we pleased? We're booking our next five markets for 1988 at the same hotel. Their "Yes, I can!" attitude made the difference.

We would recommend the accommodations at the Radisson Suites Hotel wholeheartedly. This hotel is truly an asset to your community.

Edward and Lee Melton, directors
Michigan Fashion Exposition

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