



Sherri Stecker (left), a seventh grader, and Andrea Foss, an eighth grader, during the reading period that's mandatory for all middle school students. They attend East.

Middle school Students find a place for growth

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Middle school brings a new-found freedom, where students learn to grow and where they are taught to make choices.

Individual lockers, a variety of teachers and classes, and a student council all add to the atmosphere, similar to one these students will encounter in high school.

But a middle school is not simply a "mini high school," according to one Farmington educator.

"They're learning responsibility, how to get along in a small community," said Laura Miner, assistant principal at East Middle School in Farmington Hills.

"We're helping them to grow up and teaching them along the way."

There are four middle schools in the Farmington district, attended by students in grades six to eight. O.E. Dunkel, East, Power and Warner.

National Middle Level Education Week, March 13-19, gives a closer look at these youngsters, who are too old for elementary, but not yet ready for high school.

EAST MIDDLE School sixth-graders Dawn Kastning and Jason Weiss took us on a tour of their building recently, pointing out favorite teachers and classes and showing us a variety of classrooms and programs. Both said they had stereotypes of middle school when they came to East last fall.

"I was nervous and excited," said Dawn.

She especially enjoys classes in computers and is an avid reader, according to media specialist Verla Kennedy.

Jason said he was "thinking it (middle school) would be boring, but it's not. I thought you'd just go to class and get a lot of homework."

"Kids don't put you in their lockers and slam the door — that's what we heard," he added.

Although some of the stereotypes were crushed when the new crop of sixth graders entered school last fall, there have been adjustments.

Students came from a variety of schools: Dawn came from Larkshire Elementary and Jason from William Grace Elementary. Both have kept friends from the elementaries, but made new friends, they said.

There's some roughhousing and shoving in the halls during class ex-

'Kids don't put you in their lockers and slam the door — that's what we heard.'

— Jason Weiss
East Middle 6th grader

change, but you just learn to ignore it, Dawn said.

Although Farmington's four middle schools are as unique as the students who attend them, there are similarities in what classes are offered.

There are even special programs, such as SURT — Sustained Uninterrupted Reading Time — when students and employees are asked to stop their regular routine to read for 15 minutes each day.

ELECTIVE CLASSES are shorter here than at the high school. Sixth graders begin with 10-week electives, seventh-graders' electives run 13 weeks and eighth graders go for 20 weeks, as they slowly prepare to enter high school, Miner said.

Middle school students are not allowed a lot of choices, she added. They are required to take a variety of electives to explore likes and dislikes before entering high school.

Their choices range from wood shop, one of Jason's favorites, to computers, art, music, foreign language and others.

In Louise Clacco's French class, lessons were all in French and students were called by name in French. Foreign language is new; it was approved by the Farmington school board two years ago as a middle school elective.

Down the hall, Larry LaRue's eighth-grade vocal music class spent second period singing popular music. His classes are popular, students said.

A pamphlet from the National Association of Secondary School Principals gives several guidelines for educating young teenagers, with which Miner concurs.

Offering a general education, exciting and engaging activities, helping them to explore ideas and teaching cooperation instead of competition are all functions of the middle school, according to the NASSP.

"I'm sure all the middle schools in



Dawn Kastning (left) and Jason Weiss, both sixth graders, share their educational experiences at East Middle School.

the district are still growing and changing," Miner added.

She calls the middle school a kind

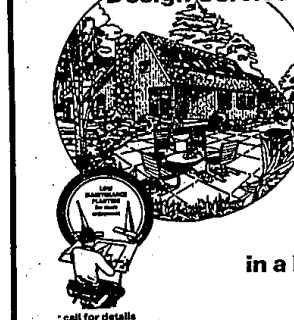
of "melting pot" for teachers, some of whom come from the elementary level and others from high school.

Help for diabetics

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Councilman urges asbestos removal

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questing plans, building specifications and construction bids for the first year of improvements, including asbestos removal. That would add about \$85,000 to the first year's program costs of \$71,800.

"I think we would be smart as council people to spend the \$150,000 now," Alkateeb said.

OF THE original \$71,800 estimated for the program's first year, about \$50,000 is now available in the park fund, financed by a five-year, 0.5-mill levy.

Under the parks and recreation plan, developed by architect Mike Kirk & Koskela architect, Detroit, the estimated \$377,400 improvements would begin this year and run through 1990.

Eventually, the city council will determine whether other improvements, estimated at more than \$162,000 but not included in the three-year program, will be made. Some of the items include a new driveway, new patio, restoration of a vestibule door, new roof, storm doors and windows and improved landscaping.

Dennis Fitzgerald, parks and recreation commission chairman, tried to slow down the council's spending.

"I'm concerned you're putting yourself into a corner," he said. "Why debate whether it's asbestos this year or next year?"

FITZGERALD LATER expressed concern for the council's lack of de-

'As a public body and knowing the hazards of asbestos, are we going to use the building in the meantime . . . and if we are, are we exposing ourselves to a potential lawsuit by someone?'

— Joe Alkateeb
councilman

bate on the costs involved with the Spicer house. "It was never, never an option to take it down. But what's the cost for that decision (to restore and renovate). I don't think I've heard anyone up there think it out."

By putting the house in the historic district, the council has committed itself to the additional improvements needed, at an estimated \$152,000, Fitzgerald said.

Never, Fitzgerald continued, did the council compare the costs of renovating the Spicer house vs. demolition and building a new visitors center. His concern stems from use of the five-year, 0.5-mill park levy, which will be used to restore and renovate the Spicer house.

"I'm not trying to cause trouble or make waves. But they are expecting the parks millage to be the Daddy Warbucks."

Proposed park office gets mixed reception

Continued from Page 1

acreage as parkland. An office building on that land violates the city's zoning ordinances, she added.

"It really bothers me when government breaks laws when it expects everyone else to follow them," she said. "We're always talking about the quality of life, and it really bothers me when special services tend to impinge on the quality of life in Heritage Park."

FOX JOINED council members Jan Dolan and Aldo Vagnozzi in urging that the special services department remain in the city hall, which Dolan called "the hub of the community." Special services includes parks and recreation, senior adults services, the San Marino Golf Course, public relations and video production.

Councilmen Ben Marks and Joe Alkateeb want to see architectural plans and costs estimates for a new building.

"I don't think we're breaking faith with the community in considering something like this," Marks said. "This building in my view doesn't deter or detract from the basic or ultimate use of this park."

Utility lines can be put underground and traffic will exist in the park with or without a new special services building, Marks said.

"I have a problem with the \$350,000. But I'm going to wait and see what you're going to come up with," Marks told administrators.

Alkateeb offered a similar viewpoint. "I think you can argue both ways. It is an office but you need a facility to service the park." Alkateeb also questioned whether 5,000 square feet of space is needed.

Collegiate job fair planned

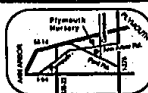
Eastern Michigan University will co-sponsor the first Michigan Collegiate Job Fair for seniors and recent graduates from more than 50 Michigan and Ohio colleges Friday, March 25.

It will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

The fair will host entry-level recruiters from more than 100 companies, organizations and government offices, including Magnavox Electronics Corp., Upjohn Co., PepsiCo Inc., KMS Fusion, Abitibi Price, Michigan Bell Telephone Co., Ford Motor Co., the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, La-Z-Boy and Carnation Co.

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