

Opinion

33203 Grand River/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

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Listen up

Schools make tactical mistake

FARMINGTON SCHOOL trustees weren't off base in opening below-capacity middle and high schools to all eligible students, regardless of where they live in the district.

Open enrollment is the trend in public education across the land.

Says trustee Susan Rennels: "An equal opportunity for every child does not mean an identical experience for every child. And I think that is what we are learning in education more than anything else."

But in retrospect, the school board made a critical tactical mistake in how it adopted a limited open enrollment policy.

The board should have introduced the policy at one meeting and adopted it at another, providing ample time in between for staff and parents to digest, discuss and fine-tune it.

By not doing so, the policy, unveiled publicly in a front-page Observer story April 21, unnecessarily triggered fear and concern about the unexpected.

No matter that the board's vote April 19 simply formalized a policy long followed but more restrictive. Before then, few parents apparently knew their non-athletes and non-musicians could transfer to Harrison, a below-capacity senior high. So in effect, the policy is new.

AS ZAN Alley, Farmington Education Association executive director, put it: "Most people thought they were supposed to go to the school in their district. I don't think it's fair to pass this off as no change. It's a dramatic change."

Alley was justified in insisting the element of surprise shouldn't accompany a major decision involving attendance boundaries.

The board asked several staff and parents to spend December voluntarily considering redistricting options to ease overcrowding. Their expertise should not have been shut out when the issue of limited open enrollment came up.

Given the board's pledge this past year to erase the impression it works under a veil of

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secrecy, Alley drove home the feeling of disenfranchisement. She underscored that perceptions often constitute reality.

She caught the ear of trustee Jack Inch, who, speaking for himself, acknowledged, "I don't think we formally announced this policy to the public firmly enough. Our error was that we did not allow enough input. I feel I made a mistake. I am really not fond of the way it came about."

"THINGS ARE changing very slippery right now with Choices, Common Campus and all these other things that are popping up. Are you planning to keep Farmington a well-rounded school where my child can go and get a complete education?" asked one Farmington High mother.

It's incumbent for the school board to assure her the answer is "yes." The ongoing senior high curriculum review and the planned profile of advanced placement courses are significant steps in assuring that.

If the new policy trips the floodgates for student transfers, the district administration must not sit idly.

Superintendent Graham Lewis seems to grasp that. As he put it: "If the idea is not a good idea, then the idea has to go the way of the dodo bird."

No school district can remain static. Education has become not only fast-paced but fast-changing. But change must be measured. It must be the product of a joint effort. It shouldn't hatch in a vacuum.

That's the lesson to be learned from the outrage sparked by the new limited open enrollment policy.

Leadership

Example needs to be set

ALONG WITH the mantle of leadership comes the obligation to lead responsibly, to set the example. The suburbs have been blessed with neighbors, sometimes prominent, who are industry leaders.

But the example some of them set is less than desired. They have crossed the line dividing accomplishment and greed.

And the inordinate compensation packages given auto industry leaders are not only excessive but bad business.

Chrysler Corp. can consider itself very, very lucky it was able to negotiate a new contract with the United Auto Workers union's 66,000 members after the recent flaps over plant closings and the extravagant compensation awarded the top brass.

How, many fair-minded people outside the UAW wondered, can the No. 3 auto maker plan to shut down its Kenosha, Wis., assembly plant on which 5,500 families depend for sustenance and yet give Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca \$17.9 million in compensation?

OVERLOOKED IN the shuffle was the fact that Chrysler Motors chairman Gerald Greenwald tapped the barrel for another \$8.6

million. Two employees alone wound up with \$24.5 million.

That sum, divided into \$40,000 annual lumps, could keep groceries on the table for 612 blue-collar workers' families. Iacocca alone is worth 447 blue-collar workers, by that reasoning.

It wasn't a public relations gaffe. It was a bad business judgment by the Chrysler board. The fact that three-fourths of Iacocca's take was due to his selling stock acquired several years ago doesn't blunt the point.

The UAW won a few items in its contract: "base employment levels" guaranteeing jobs of all workers with a year or more seniority; profit sharing for workers when the executives receive it; tighter restrictions on purchase of parts from outside the company. And, of course, a three-month reprieve was given the Kenosha plant.

Chrysler stockholders, who have seen their shares rise from the vanishing point in 1980 to about \$25 today, may feel they've done well. But at the next annual meeting, they need to raise some tough questions about the assumed worth of one or two mortal humans and about whether the management negotiating team wasn't forced to pay too high a price for two years of labor peace.

Right to know

Let the sun shine in on PSC

DRIP, DRIP, drip. In ancient China it was the water torture. In modern Lansing it's governmental bodies trying to erode the Open Meetings Act.

In years past, we saw an attempt to close the doors on all meetings with lawyers as soon as anyone even threatened a lawsuit.

Last year it was the parole board that asked and got an exemption from the "sunshine law." This year it's the state Public Service Commission.

Which will it be next year?

THE "HIDE-N-SNEAK" lobby won't attempt a frontal assault like Pickett's charge on the Open Meetings Act. Instead, it's drip, drip, drip.

The three-member Public Service Commission decides how many more millions we will spend for gas, electric and telephone bills. It already confesses to evading the law. It votes in public and takes testimony in public, but it

converses with itself and staff by means of memos carried by couriers. Golly gee, said one PSC staffer, if we held public meetings for those conversations, then they would have to listen to public comment, too, and wouldn't that be inefficient!

The PSC is in the ludicrous position of arguing that it can't operate under a law when it hasn't even tried to.

HOUSE BILL 5415, sponsored by Alma Stallworth, D-Detroit, has been reported out of the House Public Utilities Committee. That in itself was strange — a clean government bill in a utilities committee?

The bill goes to the full House of Representatives where it deserves to be rejected. The PSC should give open meetings a three-year try. Then if the PSC can prove bad results from public scrutiny, perhaps we can think about allowing certain narrowly defined topics to be closed.



Caring students earn this moment in the sun

OFTEN, THE most deserving kids are the most unobtrusive. They work behind the scenes. But they should be front and center, even if only for a morning.

Helping improve the lives of others because they care, not out of a sense of obligation, is what drives them.

Hosting an annual youth recognition breakfast is a prime example of how Farmington Youth Assistance, dedicated to preventing juvenile delinquency and promoting family well-being, lives up to its motto: "We Care About Kids."

So when I was invited to the third annual youth recognition breakfast May 4 at the Farmington Community Center, I leaped at the chance to attend.

Youth Volunteer Award plaques went to 15 senior high students who have volunteered time and energy on the community's behalf, without thought to personal reward.

AWARD WINNERS volunteered to help an individual, an organization or the community — in the spirit of good will.

"Farmington Youth Assistance is eager to honor young people who quietly and conscientiously find avenues for generous, unselfish actions



Bob Sklar

on behalf of others, but who are not normally recognized for their efforts by the community at large," wrote breakfast chairwoman Madelyn Ryan in a press release accompanying my personal invitation.

At first blush, you might think, B-O-R-I-N-G. That kind of narrow-minded thinking is exactly why the breakfast is so important.

It's unfortunate a breakfast must be held to turn the spotlight on the less-dramatic but invaluable efforts of a cross-section of our community's young leaders.

THE NEWS media are as much to blame as anyone for playing up troublemaking teenagers at the expense of more young people whose deeds are more worthy but less sensational.

That's one reason I made it my business to attend all three breakfasts. I wanted to personally help reverse the trend of good-hearted kids

too often getting lost in the newsmaker shuffle.

I wanted to do my part in giving deserving young people, with that rare quality of stick-to-itiveness, a moment in the sun.

YOUNG PEOPLE like Amber Arbuckle, who coaches special education and handicapped students for the Special Olympics. Like Jana Jensen, a Students Against Driving Drunk member who counsels elementary school students. Like Christine Pattinson, a summer camp counselor for impaired children. Like Meredith Atkins, who works with Botsford General Hospital Physical Therapy Department patients.

And like Darcel Aljouny, Sharon Allmen, Todd Began, Christopher Cahill, Caryn Cavanol, Jennifer Church, Cindy DeSouza, Jeannine Duplessie, Gina Hager, Kelli Malash and Nicole Nelson.

All 1988 Youth Recognition Award winners. The breakfast, with proud parents on hand in one of our community's most picturesque settings, is a dandy way to salute these unpretentious but inspirational teenagers.

I felt honored just to be there to honor them.

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.

No-drug film lures crowd

To the editor:

I wanted to drop you a short letter to thank you for your coverage of our film during No Drug Week.

As you may know, we sent 2,500 smaller cards to families with children, but we could in no way reach the audience you can and did.

If I didn't mention it, we had over 250 people in attendance. Thanks for your willingness to be involved in this issue which faces all of us each day.

Thanks for helping us to make this evening a success.

Ralph A. Rehndt II, pastor, New Hope Presbyterian Church Farmington Hills

Tax checkoff gains thanks

To the editor:

As the director for a local child abuse prevention agency, I want to thank the members of my community for contributing to the Children's Trust Fund while filling out their Michigan State Income Tax forms.

Although doing taxes is a tedious and timely job, taxpayers should be commended for checking off and giving a portion of their refund for child abuse prevention programs

throughout the State of Michigan.

Prevention of child abuse can have a great effect on our society, for by helping parents and children now we can reduce the number of violent adult offenders in the future, we can strengthen our families and I believe we can even reduce cruelty to animals.

Thank you for checking off line 34A. Thank you for your concern for the families in our country and state.

Meg Mittel, executive director, Child Abuse and Neglect Council County of Oakland Inc.

Cable cast city council

To the editor:

I would like to comment about the concept of placing city council meetings on cable television. I am completely in favor of cable casting the meetings. Many of the concerns mentioned in your article of April 25 have been heard before.

Beverly Hills began cable casting all regular council meetings in 1984. The results have been very positive. Some residents make it a point to watch the meetings to keep up on current governmental activities. Others have even set their VCR to tape meetings if they are out of town.

The net result is that more people are involved and informed about their council's actions. There have been instances where something was seen on cable that inspired the

viewer to drive right over to the municipal building to be heard.

Arguments that "you'll get more people on the council talking whether they have anything to say or not" simply do not hold true. (In fact, with or without cable casting, you find people occasionally talk at length without saying much.)

Another argument was, "If citizens are interested, then it's important that they come to city hall and see it in person." I disagree with this philosophically. I believe elected officials must do everything in their power to make government more accessible to the people. In some instances, this means we must make ourselves available to them.

We live in a very fast-paced and hectic society. Many times people get home late or have needs around the house which preclude their physical attendance at city hall. I support cable casting or any other method that makes it easier for residents to become informed and involved.

Michael J. Bouchard, candidate, state representative 69th District

Patterson in good humor

To the editor:

Based on your recent editorial, can I assume that I won't be doing your legal work come Jan. 1, 1989?

L. Brooks Patterson, prosecuting attorney Oakland County

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