

Opinion

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

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Vote yes Support schools' bond issue

AFTER CUTTING through the rhetoric, we see a clear need for a new elementary school in western Farmington Hills.

Afrill it's not. It's essential to ease classroom overcrowding and long bus rides. No child should have to be taught in a hallway or sit on a bus for an hour each day.

At Gill Elementary, the three first-grade classes have 26 students each — above the first-grade ideal of 24, reflective of the trend toward smaller classes and specialized learning/teaching stations.

In many elementary buildings, there's no room to designate classroom space for art, music, science and computers.

Not one of the district's 12 elementary schools is west of Drake — in the area bursting with growth and 27 percent of the younger students.

New homes there have pushed 11 of the elementary schools to capacity. Elementary enrollment has grown by 1,000 in the past five years. It's up 90 this year and is projected to rise through 1994.

Overcrowding touches, to some extent, every one of the elementary schools. It requires a district-wide solution — namely, a westside school.

WE URGE a yes vote when Farmington Public Schools voters go to the polls in a special election Tuesday, Jan. 31. Voters will consider approving \$7.3 million in bonds to build a 600-student elementary that will be a prototype for upgrading other school buildings.

Because of retiring bonds, approval would not raise the district's debt retirement levy beyond the current 1.2 mills. With approval, the total debt retirement cost to a taxpayer whose home is valued at \$150,000 would be no more than \$90 a year next year.

This bond proposal is smaller than one rejected by 218 voters last September. The defeated proposal called for \$7 million in bonds for an elementary and early childhood center on the west side and another \$20 million in bonds to tackle districtwide safety needs.

It's essential to ease classroom overcrowding and long bus rides. No child should have to be taught in a hallway or sit on a bus for an hour each day.

While elementary level enrollment is on the rise, overall enrollment is declining. So there's no sign the district will need more facilities in the future.

If voters say yes, there's a chance the new school — nestled in a rolling, wooded nook on 11 Mile east of Halsted — could still open by September 1990, the original target date.

IN THIS case, bonding — a method of borrowing money much like a mortgage — is cost efficient. It also leaves the decision about a major payout where it belongs — with the taxpayers.

Beyond that, we oppose use of operating money for non-emergency capital projects.

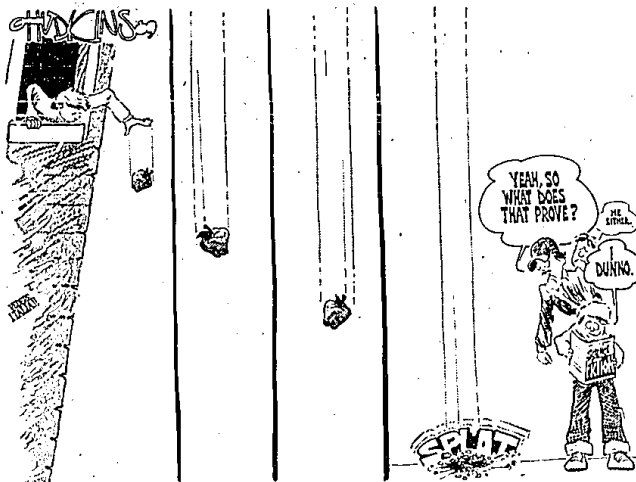
The district can't use voter-approved operating money, budgeted or in reserve, to build a new school — clearly a capital project.

And there's not nearly enough uncommitted money, only \$909,000, in the district's capital fund to cover the cost.

Short of maybe borrowing the money and using some its county-allocated millage for a period of years to pay off the loan — a method that would siphon money ticketed for operations — the district has no other payment options.

Without the new school, the district will have no option but to continue to add portable classrooms — at \$50,000 a pop. Longacre already has five, Flanders two and Larkshire one.

Vote yes Tuesday, Jan. 31. The quality of education in Farmington Public Schools is bound to drop if learning conditions during a youngster's most formative years are allowed to become intolerable.



Enthusiasm sets tone for Hills' Mayor Sever

NO DOUBT about it: Terry Sever is eager to be Farmington Hills' new mayor.

He ended his outlook speech last week by leaping from his seat at the city council table and declaring: "I say to the people of Farmington Hills, I accept the challenge!"

Earlier in his extemporaneous remarks, Sever vowed: "Our goal for the year 2000 is to make Farmington Hills one of the most livable cities in the state of Michigan."

Sever didn't delve into the obstacles he's sure to face this year as the ceremonial mayor. But he did touch on the need to balance a developer's right to develop his land against the city's right to demand a certain quality of development.

Sever's upbeat speech was his shining moment. And his excitement hopefully serves as a harbinger of good things to come for this on-the-move city of 68,000.

As he so enthusiastically put it: "We can develop a community by the year 2000 that will cause a person to get off at Metropolitan Airport, drive down the expressway through other communities, stay overnight in Southfield, drive through Farmington Hills, meet somebody in Novi and say to that person, 'Wow, Farmington Hills is a tremendous community!'"



Bob Sklar

SEVER was right on in kicking off his speech by saying, "Already, I can sense that people wonder what kind of person I am, what kind of leader I will be."

A former national leader of the Jaycees, Sever was elected to a two-year city council term in 1985 and re-elected to a four-year term in 1987.

Early on, despite his Jaycee success, Sever didn't seem comfortable at the council table. It was hard to pinpoint where he stood on many issues.

But I'll concede that he has grown more comfortable and confident. Now the chances are better you'll at least know where he's coming from on a given vote.

As mayor, Sever promises to exude integrity, honesty and openness. I trust that he sticks to those principles as political pressures mount.

MEANWHILE, I'm impressed by Sever's commitment to his wife, Linda, and three children, who attended his swearing-in Jan. 9.

Acknowledging it's hard to balance family, work and politics, he pledged to take along his wife and kids as he makes the rounds as mayor — so they can share in the range of his experiences.

One of nine children himself, Sever said: "The things I missed out on, the sacrifices of my parents, made me understand what's important in life — to be good to other people, to be fair."

A rough road lies ahead for the new mayor. Much of the road is rutted with pivotal questions about land use planning, public involvement in decision making, even the order of the council agenda.

Over time, we'll see what kind of mayor Sever is. But his goal is one that any community would be proud to achieve:

"There isn't any reason why in 10 or 20 years, we couldn't look back and say we made the right decisions, we did the right things, we put the money in the right place. We have addressed the concerns. And we have a classic. We have one of the finest communities in America."

Neglected Science in need of a boost

SCIENCE IS A mystery to many, but neglecting a topic that is difficult to understand has left the nation in a twofold predicament: Our top scientists find their scores lacking when compared to their international peers; the average citizens in this democracy find themselves ill prepared to participate wisely in national debates about such crucial topics as solid waste disposal, nuclear power, AIDS and acid rain.

The status of science education in our communities is examined in a special report starting on the front page of today's paper. The report concludes Monday.

The stories detail both perceived and documented shortcomings in scientific studies: unqualified and unprepared science teachers; outdated and uninspiring textbooks; inadequate equipment and supplies; non-demanding graduation requirements; and disinterested and distracted students.

The same stories show the bright side of science education in America: bright, innovative teachers who make science a vibrant course of study, and a renewed dedication to science in many schools.

From this report come a number of recommendations:

- Private industry must take a more active role in public science education.

- Leading firms should turn employees over to school districts as full-time consultants for one to two years. These professionals could support staff efforts and provide students at all grade levels with living, breathing examples of interesting, rewarding science careers.

- Teachers repeatedly stressed the need for effective science studies in early grade levels. More districts need to follow the lead in Wayne Westland, where there is an elementary school science coordinator.

- The relationship must be stressed between science and other courses such as social studies, political science and geography. Just as all teachers should be reading and writing instructors, so should all teachers be science teachers.

- Teachers must be well trained and qualified. Elementary school teachers must have the confidence to include science instruction in their daily routine. The day must end when many physics teachers do not have physics majors.



- More effort has to be required from students. This motivation must come from parents, who must insist on good attendance and who must involve themselves in their children's school work.

- Instructors must encourage hands-on science lessons rather than relying on encyclopedic textbooks.

- Science comes alive when a Birmingham Seaholm teacher lies on a bed of nails and lets another teacher slam a hammer onto his chest; or when a team of students measures the velocity of a Cedar Point amusement ride; or when a Plymouth Canton teacher shoots plastic and steel bullets to demonstrate laws of physics; or when Southfield students study firsthand the ecology of the Rouge River.

- Top students must be further challenged, whether it be through consortiums with other schools, contracts with community colleges or arrangements with private industry.

- Some improvements carry a hefty price tag since science courses are expensive: "It historically underfunded."

- Look at Westland John Glenn High School that has a planetarium that is sparingly used because of budget cutbacks. Look at Plymouth-Canton schools where a science teacher may have to work with an annual supplies budget of \$60 a year.

- Remedying these situations can be expensive, but the alternative is more costly. A number of science teachers hope that current attention on lagging science scores will boost public demand for improvement much the way that the launch of Sputnik spurred classroom science 30 years ago.

- We hope they are right. Science is too important to continue riding in the back seat.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

No bouquets for writer

To the editor:
I can tell Catherine Trainor Dec. 25 why she was so mentally focused on her Livonia Mall restaurant incident for two full days: She was conscious-stricken. And if she wasn't, she should have been.

How dare she so loftily and self-righteously brag about the fact that she was responsible for a hard-working, conscientious, well-meaning young woman losing her job two days before Christmas? If this is an example of her idea of unbiased charity and blind justice to all, then she is the evil in our midst.

In the first place, Ms. Trainor made her point in her scathing response to the waitress' innocent question. (A simple, "No, I don't mind at all" would have sufficed.) Was it necessary to further call attention to her self-righteous plety by inviting the owner outside, under the watchful, curious eye of every other person in the restaurant, including, of course, the nervous "young woman" in the bright blue blouse covered with flowers?

Now then, even that accolade to her insatiable ego was not enough: now she uses her position and ability to further announce her wonderful unblighted, spotless character by

writing an article for publication in a newspaper.

Several thousand readers will undoubtedly sit back in their chair, having read the article with a lump in their throat and pride of country swelling up in their hearts, and say, "What a wonderful person that Catherine Trainor is — so unprejudiced and fair-minded!"

If that's what you're thinking, C.T., think again. You cost a woman her job. Period! No bouquets for you.

Lee Sales,
Farmington Hills

Strikes are not legal

To the editor:
I was incensed at a recent article in the Observer, "Teachers won't lose for strike."

What's wrong with Gov. Blanchard? Attorney General Kelley? Judges? And our state senators? We have a state law that states our public servants cannot strike and yet we have had 273 teachers strike in the last 10 years. A disgrace!

Our gutless wonders are like the ostrich who put their heads in the sand and hope the situation will disappear.

This is a law and should be enforced by Gov. Blanchard, State At-

torney General Kelley, state senators.

Nick Smith, R-Hillsdale: "I'm willing to make their strikes legal as long as we have similar penalties."

The state Senate rejected a bill to fine striking teachers a day's pay for a day on the picket line. The vote was 19 against and 17 in favor. We have 17 senators who voted for the taxpayers. Nineteen senators who seem beholden to the teachers union, MEA.

No thanks to Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, who voted against this bill.

Senate minority leader Art Miller, D-Warren, objected that we always put the blame for public education on the backs of the professional people.

It's a sad day when we tell teachers we are going to do away with their bargaining rights. What bargaining rights are we doing away with?

Industrial workers that go on strike forfeit a day's pay for every day they are on strike. This is a penalty you pay for the right to strike. The teachers should be no different.

I think Senate minority leader Art Miller, Jack Faxon of Farmington Hills and the other 17 senators that voted against this bill should hang their heads in shame.

Now that you have failed to make strikes legal for the teachers, what are you and all our elected officials going to do when the teachers go out on the next illegal strike?

Leonard Weems,
Farmington Hills

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