

Opinion

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

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Common campus Sibling priority makes sense

FAMILY MEANS as much at Highmeadow Common Campus as learning. But not granting sibling priority when slots open in the 300-student alternative magnet school weakens parental involvement and family unity, parents say.

On March 14, the Farmington school board will consider a request by the Highmeadow PTA to grant priority to the 25 siblings of first through fifth graders now enrolled in the two-year pilot program.

The request poses a dilemma. But we think the school board should honor it.

Highmeadow was opened this school year as part of a creative, multifaceted plan to ease elementary-level overcrowding.

But the district did too good a job in selling the school's enrichment lure. More than 400 student names were submitted for the lottery that decided the lucky 300 for the 1988-89 school year.

Next fall, only 50 first-grade slots will open. But 800 present kindergartners will move to first grade.

WE APPRECIATE Superintendent Graham Lewis' support of an open lottery, which he calls more equitable for the "greater community." But that lack doesn't address the intangible family factor.

What's more, the lottery this year was weighted toward students whose home schools were overcrowded — so there's precedent for granting legitimate priority.

So we agree with trustee Janice Rohnick, who told Highmeadow parents: "You did take a risk and should be rewarded. And you were rewarded in part — by a wonderful year for your children."

But because of the risk you took and because of the success you have helped make this building, I would not be opposed to sibling preference.

Separating siblings contradicts Highmeadow's family emphasis, a natural for a common campus. It reduces the effectiveness of parents,

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forced to juggle two sets of teachers, two sets of PTAs and two sets of curriculum.

FOR HIGHMEADOW to work, parents — through the PTA, an advisory group and volunteer service — must continue to play a key role. Principal Jan Colliton and her able staff have succeeded in part because of active parent support.

"Common Campus recognizes the integral part parents play in the educational process of their children," according to a district policy statement.

Granted, parents aren't forced to send their children to Highmeadow. But the administration, which deserves kudos for creating such a hugely successful program, did say last year it would "make every effort to keep children from the same family together."

What do you do, one parent asked, when a child extols the virtues of Highmeadow to a highly impressionable younger brother or sister, who often look to older siblings as role models?

A second common campus in a district of 10,000 students with a rising elementary enrollment doesn't seem so distant now. The school board should look seriously at accelerating the timetable.

Meanwhile, we think the district should take pains not fall to spread some of what makes Highmeadow so special to the 11 traditional elementary schools so a larger share of youngsters can share in the enrichment bounty.



Fall Hills council races to decide city's course

IT COULD be the most significant city council election in Farmington Hills' 16-year history.

This November, voters will fill five of the seven council seats.

It appears the ballot will contain two races: filling four expiring terms and filling one unexpired term.

Facing re-election will be Jody Soronen, Ben Marks and Aldo Vagnozzi. Phil Arnold, who replaced newly elected state Rep. Jan Dolan last December, will face election for the first time.

Whoever fills the unexpired term of Joe Alkatech, who resigned Feb. 20, also must run for election.

Voters will either elect house, reinforce the status quo or choose a blend in perspectives.

The future direction for this city of 68,000 — in the midst of preparing a quality-of-life plan for the 1990s — should be clear after Nov. 7.

WITH MAYBE a dozen candidates vying for the five seats, city clerk Kathy Dorman and her able crew will be severely tested on election day.

There's no shortage of issues to lure candidates: land use, zoning, ethics, roads, public safety needs, public image, park development, even voter participation.

The basic concern among most city council hopefuls seems to be quality of life.



Bob Sklar

Controlled growth, improved roads and protecting the city's residential character are popular pitches on the stump.

It's hard to say if the political sparks that have flown around the city hall the last two years will translate into a bigger turnout at the polls.

The last two council elections have drawn only 14 percent of the city's 42,000 registered voters. Even a 1987 slate of nine candidates, the largest since 1979, didn't prove much of a lure.

AMONG THE incumbents, Ben Marks seems to face the toughest re-election challenge despite serving the city in a variety of ways since 1989.

It took a group of citizens to reveal that in 1987, when he was mayor, Marks bounced a check for a sewer tap-in fee he owed and left it unpaid for 1 1/2 years.

Marks paid the fee, with full interest and penalties, the week the story broke last August. He also apolo-

gized for putting City Manager William Costick, who kept the non-payment as a receivable instead of putting it on the tax rolls, in a compromising position.

Marks has since pushed home day care controls and has spearheaded fund-raising for both the community center and Heritage Park in a determined bid to restore his credibility. Come fall, we'll know if he's on target.

SORONEN, ELECTED to the city council three times, holds several community leadership posts. Vagnozzi, a longtime council watcher, proved two years ago that door-to-door campaigning indeed works.

Arnold, a former planning commissioner, appears to have a growing base of support. Declared candidates for Alkatech's seat include Larry Lichtman, Marty Kroehner, Jon Grant and Dick Corey — all well-known around city hall.

Grass-roots politicking should make for a very lively fall campaign, as lawn signs, bumper stickers, placards and other political graffiti pop up.

But as I said before the last council election in 1987, I'm going to look for substance beneath the hoopla. Reducing the fall race to a popularity contest would be a travesty.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Home ownership Blanchard serves up good idea

OWNING your own home. From the quaint colonials of Plymouth to the brick ranches of Southfield to the newest subdivisions of Rochester Hills, that part of the American dream has been the driving force for generations of suburbanites.

For many Detroiters in the years immediately following World War II, the desire for a home on a nice-sized chunk of land at an affordable price was the motivation for leaving the city in which they grew up.

The communities in western Wayne and Oakland counties were their destination. Urban flight from crime and the resulting suburban congestion didn't come along until much later.

But the newest generation of potential suburban homeowners — people in their late 20s and early 30s who grew up in the suburbs — may never know the satisfaction of having a place that is truly "their own."

Their quest for a home at an affordable price is being done in by the economic realities of the late 1980s. For many, their parents' dream has become a pipe dream.

THAT IS WHY we support continuation of a full tax deduction for mortgage interest. And that is why, although we have some reservations about the specifics, we believe Gov. James Blanchard's HOST (Home Ownership Savings Trust) plan for first-time home buyers is a good idea.

Both these measures will help keep home ownership an attainable goal for suburban residents.

The steep rise in housing prices since the early 1970s — outstripping wage gains and even the general rate of inflation by a nearly 2-1 margin — has cut deeply into the pocketbooks of most people. The \$30,000 home in 1970 would today sell for close to \$90,000. Unfortunately, the people who could afford that home in 1970, can now only afford a home in the \$60,000 range. These people are being "priced out" of many suburban homes.

The nationwide home ownership rate to help 25-29-year-olds has decreased by 7.5 percent since 1980, according to a home construction trade journal survey. The rate for 30-34-year-olds is down by 8 percent. In fact, the rate for all age groups has dropped despite the fact that the economy is headed into its seventh consecutive year of expansion.

With interest rates headed back up the ladder

We support continuation of a full tax deduction for mortgage interest. And although we have some reservations about the specifics, we believe Gov. James Blanchard's HOST (Home Ownership Savings Trust) plan for first-time home buyers is a good idea.

— the prime lending rate was increased to 11 1/4 percent last week — even more potential first-time home buyers are going to be pushed into renewing their apartment leases.

NOW IS CERTAINLY not the time for Congress to be monkeying with the tax deduction for mortgage interest, although there are some legislators who are considering just that. They believe cutting the amount of deductible interest is one way to tame the federal budget deficit.

While we applaud any effort on behalf of the deficit problem, cutting the mortgage interest deduction isn't feasible in light of the current economy. It would only manage to freeze more first-time home buyers — who use the deduction to help pay property taxes and other ownership expenses not incurred as renters — out of the picture.

The HOST plan, meanwhile, is another step in the right direction. Under the plan, first-time home buyers in Michigan would be able to save for a down payment by socking away a small portion each month with the state government for three to 10 years.

The state would invest the money in treasury bills and interest accumulated in the account would be tax-free.

At the end of the specified period, the state would guarantee a 10-percent down payment toward a house in a pre-chosen neighborhood, regardless of how much housing costs have increased.

The plan is similar to the Michigan Education Trust proposal the state introduced last year to help parents pay future college tuition costs.

There are pitfalls. Should housing costs rise at a meteoric rate, all Michigan taxpayers would have to foot a portion of the bill for those enrolled in the program.

But we feel the benefit of such a program — helping the current generation and future generations of suburban residents to buy their own home — outweighs the risk.



Gov. James Blanchard

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.

Let's all drive a little slower

To the editor:

Along with Carol Lee, we started the initial petition as citizens to work with Farmington Hills in monitoring the design and paving of Drake Road.

The major concern both by this formed citizens committee and Farmington was and still is the safety and beauty of this road.

We also realized that paving would open it up to speeds no matter how conservative and beautiful its design.

Now that this stretch has been open less than three months, the speeders have become the reality of our worst fears.

Added to this are the fast trucks who don't care for its ambience but rather its use as a quick bypass. This speeding is now a citywide problem. I say that we, as residents and neighbors, should put an end to this by driving the posted limits, be it Drake or any other road in our area.

After all, we call these cities home after working a long day to afford this suburban luxury. Let's set a driving example for those who work but who don't live here.

Let's make a positive statement

that speeders are not tolerated in this great area we call home. When all things are considered: Are we really in a hurry?

Ed Krol,
Drake Road Citizens Committee
Farmington Hills

Paper helps fight drunks

To the editor:

Thank you for writing such a great editorial on behalf of the red ribbon campaign and MADD (Dec. 8).

Our volunteers have indeed made a difference with their hard work. But others deserve praise as well.

Media support is obviously crucial to persuading society that drinking and driving is no longer acceptable. Your papers have demonstrated that commitment over and over again, through innovative articles, editorial support and with the ad space you've generously provided.

The fact that we are so well-known and supported is in no small measure due to the attention you've given us.

So thank you for helping us become what we are today.

Greg Glen, president,
MADD-Oakland County

Drugs must be beaten

To the editor:

On Sept. 6, 1620, the Pilgrims set sail for the New World to escape the iron rulers of the Church of England. On Dec. 21, 1620, they landed at a place now called Plymouth, Mass.

389 years later, we are not colonies, but a United States and a free nation. A new ruler reigns and it's called drugs.

On Feb. 23, Bob Sklar wrote an article called, "The Decision to Shoot: It can often be deadly." In between the lines of the article lies the real terror behind the trouble, drugs.

Men are killing each other. Men are robbing banks. Women are selling their children and abandoning newborn babies because of their drug habits.

Some children are born addicted, thanks to drug-using parents. Unlike the Pilgrims, we cannot just get on board a ship, unless it's a space ship to escape.

It is a war that must be beaten or it will beat us. What's worse is our children will pay the price.

Vernon C. Kleplinski,
Farmington Hills

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