

Opinion

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

12A(F) O&E Thursday, March 30, 1989

Confusion Change in lottery: bad timing

CONFUSION OVER how incoming first-graders will be chosen has tarnished the early success at Highmeadow Common Campus, the Farmington Public Schools magnet alternative elementary.

Blame for the confusion rests squarely with the school board.

On March 14, trustees granted a Feb. 13 request by the Highmeadow PTA to give priority to 30 siblings of first-through fifth-graders now enrolled in the two-year pilot program.

But that action conflicts with a letter sent by the district administration to all kindergarten parents Feb. 21. The letter invited parents to apply the week of March 6 for an open lottery to fill 50 first-grade slots at Highmeadow this coming September. More than 130 parents responded.

As it stands, Highmeadow will have 52 first-grade seats in the 1990-91 school year. The 22 seats not going to siblings will be filled by students chosen in a lottery involving the four overcrowded elementarys.

WE UNDERSTAND why the parents who were led to believe the lottery would be open are angry. The school board did change the rules mid-stream. It should have acted on the sibling priority request before the letter announcing an open lottery went out.

A breakdown in communication between the school board and the district administration apparently caused the rift. Parents who, in good faith, applied for the open lottery shouldn't be penalized.

As parent Lonnie Joe Jr. put it, "The process is the problem. A board such as this has to be above reproach. The process must be so, too."

A reasonable compromise might have been to hold an open lottery weighted slightly toward the overcrowded schools — a motion defeated by the school board last week. Remember, helping to ease classroom overcrowding was the impetus for opening Highmeadow.

As part of redistricting for the new west-side elementary, slated to open in September 1990, the district could have held a public hearing to

The school board . . . should have acted on the sibling priority request before the letter announcing an open lottery went out.

elicit feelings about sibling priority at Highmeadow for 1990-91 and beyond.

WE SUPPORT the sibling priority concept at Highmeadow because siblings aren't separated at the district's 11 traditional elementarys.

Separating siblings contradicts Highmeadow's — and every elementary's — family emphasis. An elementary school is really an extension of the family — the first extension for many students.

The school district doesn't — and shouldn't — bill Highmeadow as a superior school. Students at the other elementarys aren't receiving an inferior education. It's not a question of promoting a privileged class.

Yes, Highmeadow offers enrichment classes not offered elsewhere. And we'd like to see those prototype classes introduced at each elementary as soon as it's practical — not limited to just the common campus.

BUT THAT'S not the immediate issue. Timing is.

Siblings didn't have priority this year. Without it next year, 16 sibling kindergartners still would have a chance to go to Highmeadow because they attend the four overcrowded schools.

Apologizing, trustee Susan Rennels said confusion can't always be avoided in a growing district with changing educational expectations. We believe her apology was sincere. But we still think the school board should have backed off on sibling priority and reverted to a slightly weighted open lottery.

That would have helped defuse cries of foul play.

Speed limit

Make it 65 mph and enforce it

MICHIGAN DRIVERS have voted with their feet — specifically, they have voted to repeal freeway speed limits.

Moreover, they have put the State Police freeway patrols out of business.

We believe the law must match reality. And reality dictates that the majority of drivers disobey posted speed limits, particularly when it comes to the confusing urban 55 mph versus the rural 65 mph.

The goal is to put some sanity and effectiveness back into speed enforcement. The state should make the highway speed limit a uniform 65 mph — and then enforce it to the limit.

To understand the problem, just examine driving habits on surrounding freeways.

Start with western I-696 in Southfield, Farmington Hills and Novi. Construction to widen it to four lanes is under way, and the posted limit is 45 mph.

The actual speed limit is 65. That's the lower speed limit, of course. Anyone fool enough to go slower is likely to find a truck the size of a whale in his tailpipe.

As soon as traffic lightens a little, someone is bound to shoot by at 75 or 80.

Next, go to I-275 from Novi through Livonia, Westland and down to Monroe. For a decade, the prevailing speed has been 72. It's a fact of life, and many go faster.

On I-96 from Livonia into Detroit, drivers used to observe a 55 limit. No longer. The prevailing speed is higher than 60. Many travel at 75.

Ditto with I-75, the Lodge, I-94 and any we have missed.

IN MYTHOLOGY, alias state law, we have a 65 speed limit on "rural" freeways and a 55 limit on "urban" freeways.

No one you'll meet in freeway flight paths can tell you the difference, but the experts in the Michigan Department of Transportation are supposed to know. They were to have posted the speed limits accordingly.

In truth, one rarely sees a speed limit sign on any freeway.

Two years ago, there was a big battle in the Legislature over whether to raise the speed limit to 65 rural and 55 urban. There were hair-splitting differences over how to define the difference and whether to include such state roads built to freeway specifications as US-23 and US-131.

The argument turned out to have been largely foolish. Drivers travel at whatever speed they wish on any kind of freeway. Indeed, many ob-

The goal is to put some sanity and effectiveness back into speed enforcement. The state should make the highway speed limit a uniform 65 mph — and then enforce it to the limit.

serve that speeds are greater on urban freeways than out in the countryside.

State police have become nearly invisible. Except for a few highly publicized holidays such as Memorial Day, they rarely enforce speed limits.

One hopes they are out doing more important things, like busting drug dealers or staking out bank robbers.

The federal government also has been lax.

Year after year, we heard stories from Washington that federal highway aid would be cut because more than half of Michigan drivers were consistently exceeding the 55 limit.

The fact is that we're driving faster than ever, the feds haven't cut a penny of aid, and they probably won't. Michigan drivers repealed federal law, too, with their feet.

DRIVERS ARE actually doing what comes naturally. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. explained it all in his scholarly lectures on "The Common Law" back in the mid-19th century.

The lifeblood of the law, Holmes said, is not logic but experience. More simply, the law isn't engraved in granite but is constantly modified by people to suit changing conditions.

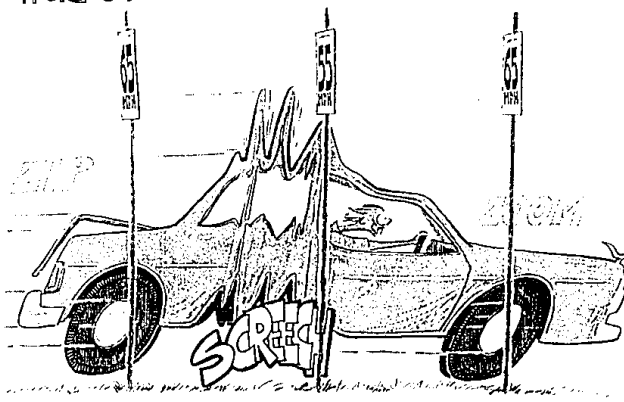
Certainly Michigan drivers have produced a late 20th century final chapter for Holmes' tome by effectively repealing our democratic speed laws.

Michigan is, as many business speakers remind us, in an international market. No longer can Americans wrap their oceans around them in splendid isolation. We are witnessing the Europeanization of our freeways.

On the West German Autobahn, for example, there are no speed limits. You drive as fast as your car will carry you. If you have a status car like a Porsche or BMW, you go like a bat out of the north wind, for that is the natural right of the lordly. If you're in a VW, you put-put along, for that is the natural fate of the peasant.

Such is the common law of Michigan.

THINKING



Very potent weapon: reading to your kids

Everybody enjoys a good story — young, old or middle-aged. But most important, being read to makes a person want to read.



Steve Barnaby

WE ALL have been deluged with frightening reports of illiteracy among the masses. Books have been written, studies commissioned and legislation launched to deal with what is perceived as a national problem.

With some justification, we've managed to work ourselves into quite a frenzy. Making a big fuss over the crisis has made us feel like we are doing something about it. Not much, but something.

Maybe, just maybe, we've made the problem more complicated than the problem.

Recently, I was invited to read at Westland's Elliot Elementary School.

Reading to others is an art which is going the way of letter writing and keeping literary journals. Unfortunately, we've fallen to reserving reading aloud for only the very young. After a certain age, we expect children just to pick it up on their own.

Everybody enjoys a good story — young, old or middle-aged. But most important, being read to makes a person want to read. And when it gets right down to it, reading is still the way we learn.

My heart was touched after by the letters I received from the students in Sandy Beecher's class.

AFTER BROWSING through my library, I picked out a couple of Mark Twain tales — "Mrs. McWill-

ams and the Lightning," and "What Happened to the Blue Jay." I loved reading them again — it's been awhile and I could tell that most of the students loved it also.

But the biggest reward for me were some of the letters.

Let me share a few excerpts. Some will make you laugh, others will make you think. But they all will make you realize the importance of the written word.

"I always try to read before I go to bed. I even have to argue with my mom sometimes," said Jim Russell, who signed "your new friend."

"In our literature, we all read Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol.' I thought it was a real fascinating story. I enjoy reading a lot. In my spare time I take time to read," said Charity Frum.

"I like reading books. My favorites are the ones about kids having diseases," said Carrie Stoyak.

"Samuel Clemens is one of my ancestors from my stepmother's side," said Dan Cusson.

"Even though I'm a girl, I enjoy reading hockey magazines about the Detroit Red Wings," said Jaime, a girl with obviously impeccable taste when it comes to sports.

And how about this:

"Well, I'm 12 years old and I have two parakeets. Their names are Fred and Frank. Fred does a crazy thing. He bobs his head. I guess it means he's excited," said Jim Emery.

And this was my absolute favorite, from Dean Harrison.

"I liked the way you encouraged us to read better and to like reading. I love to read and there are many things that people can read. Since you were a guest reader, I wasn't really listening, but I heard everything you said. I want to be an artist but many people said I'll be a sissy. P.S. I'll show them."

Thanks kids. My day at Elliot was one of the best I've had in a long time. And remember, mom and dad, read to your kids. They'll thank you the rest of their lives.

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.

It's bonkers at City Hall

To the editor:

Tree ordinances, fence ordinances, snow removal ordinances. Wow!

City and Hills' folk are in a bonker-funk these last few weeks trying to decide what's what or what's not what.

When's a tree 24 inches above what surface? What's a tree doing growing so big that it breaks sidewalks? The nerve!

What's a fence replacement and what's a repair? What's a cosmetic versus a privacy fence? What's a fence?

Well, let me tell you, one and all, there are among us those — yours truly included — who think there oughts be a law or two more on the books.

For starters at City Hall, Farmington. Certain items grab my attention daily.

The city requires sidewalks for residents; yet the city has no sidewalk at all on its Liberty Street side. It has walks, though, north of the building on the Grand River side, but if you take one nearest Grand River, you end up meeting yourself coming back. A sidewalk, I've always thought, should go some place.

When the snow is gone take a walk down Grand River east. Note all the debris that clings to the stones and shrubs and weeds grass along the business property. Yet the city has

fits if some businessman doesn't get his snow removed in a specified time. Rubbish, you say? That's right; and there's quite a bit in downtown Farmington.

There's really a whole lot more we could legislate. Think about it. If you're like me, you're tired of these hanging the tennery to grow so gingerly that they break up sidewalks. I say cut all the trees on the easements, every darn one of them. Cut 'em all down and cement all the easements and all the front yards.

And if a crack appears, by God, bring in the city bulldozers and tear up the yards and do them all over and send the bills to the homeowners, and if the bill is more than \$1,000, give those homeowners one month to pay, and give those with piddling amounts six months to pay. We need the big bucks for City Hall improvements.

Speaking of which, hey, it took just seconds last fall for the city's good ole boys to appropriate \$40,000 for refurbishing the City Hall and parking lot.

There is one thing I like, though, and it's this: I like to hear a rooster crowing on a quiet morning, winter or summer.

That cock-a-doodle-doo that I hear gives me a momentary thought of an earlier time when Farmington struggled with pigs and slop and fence viewers and muddy roads and horse drovers, from 14 Mile to beautiful downtown Farmington.

Lee S. Peel,
Farmington

Lend support to Senate bill

To the editor:

Senate Bill 25 is legislation dealing with reimbursement for municipal costs incurred during the prosecution of alcohol or drug-related driving offenses. Our council unanimously approved a motion to begin this activity at the district court level.

However, it appears the enabling legislation may be required to "get the ball rolling." This enabling legislation would allow our community to pass an ordinance to recover the high cost of this important policing activity.

It is equitable that the person who acts with such irresponsibility be required to pay for the costs associated with such actions.

Please join in the battle to protect the community from the dangers of these irresponsible individuals and the associated costs of removing them from the road.

Write a letter to Rep. Perry Bullard, the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, at the State Capitol, Lansing 48909.

Last year, such a bill passed the Senate 35-0 but died in Bullard's committee. Encourage his support of the legislation in committee and on the House floor.

Michael Boschard, president,
village of Beverly Hills

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Steve Barnaby managing editor
Rick Herberg assistant managing editor
Dick Isahm general manager
Richard Brady director of advertising
Fred Wright director of circulation

Suburban Communications Corp.
Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Agnien president