

# Voters to elect 2 school trustees

**By Casey Hans**  
staff writer

Four contenders will square off for two seats on the Farmington Board of Education in the annual district election Monday, June 13. Incumbents John Cotton of Farmington and Helen Dilzhazy of Farmington Hills are being challenged by John Akouri and Robert Ranney, both of Farmington Hills. The two highest vote-getters will serve four-year terms on the seven-member, non-partisan board.

The Observer sent questionnaires to each candidate, asking for responses to 12 questions on current to-

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cal educational issues. Below are each candidate's responses to the first six questions; the remainder will be printed in a later issue.

**MORE INFORMATION** about the candidates can be obtained at two scheduled candidate nights:

• Thursday, May 18, 7:30 p.m. at the Botsford Inn, 28000 Grand River, in Farmington Hills. Sponsored by the Farmington Advocacy Club.

**W**HY ARE you running for the Farmington Board of Education?

I am running for the board of education because of my lifelong interest in and concern for children and youth of all ages, most specifically guiding the program and which help them to develop their individual physical, intellectual and social potentials.

2. What is your philosophy on the role of public education?

On the role of public education, I firmly believe that if our democratic society is to survive, we must continue to have choice. A strong public school system is a necessary choice and an option which should continue to be available to all families.

**Name:** Helen Dilzhazy, 62  
Address: Frances Trull, Farmington Hills, District resident, 24 years.  
Job: associate professor, Eastern Michigan University.  
Family: husband, Joseph; two children and 18 exchange students.  
Education: bachelor's, master's and M.B.A., Michigan State University; Ph.D., University of Michigan.  
Community: serving first four-year term on Farmington school board, past president county Youth for Understanding chair, 1972-80; United Way chair for small business in the Jackson area, 1986-87; Jackson 1990 board of directors, 1986-87; Farmington/Novi Soroptimist vice president, 1979-82; member Rotary International, 1987-present.



**Helen Dilzhazy**  
Incumbent

shouldn't be prohibited from this, nor should they be forced to do this unless it is by a vote of the people in the affected districts.

5. What is your opinion of the Highmeadow Common Campus pilot project? What do you propose for the future, in relation to this?

I believe it was a good solution to the 1,000 or so parents who opposed redistricting. The curriculum is exciting. Most of the staff is new and energetic. I understand parents wanting their children to stay together - however, I would never

again vote for sibling preference.

6. What is your philosophy about releasing information that may relate to attorney-client privilege? About dealing with taxpayers of the district?

Some attorney-client privilege is just that. If it involves a sensitive personnel matter, negotiations or fund purchase figures, it should not be released. Those items which are used for public statements should be open to the public. As a Farmington Hills taxpayer, I wish to be dealt with fairly and expect to treat others fairly too.

3. What is your opinion on open enrollment policies among schools in the same district?

My opinion is that this is long overdue. Families should have choices within the local education district they support with their taxes. This was not always possible with overcrowded schools - but many districts could exercise the option to-day.

4. What is your opinion on open enrollment policies among schools in different districts?

At this point, I think it would be better to limit the open enrollments to the local school district. If two districts should opt for a cooperative or collaborative arrangement, they

**W**HY ARE you running for the Farmington Board of Education?

The Farmington school district is one of the wealthiest school districts in the state, spending nearly \$6,928 per student; however, student performance, as measured by MEAP scores and high school SAT scores, is disturbingly low.

For example, SAT scores for the Farmington district are 446 verbal and 508 math as compared to 457 verbal and 518 math as the average scores in the state of Michigan. My elementary MEAP scores are significantly lower than the surrounding school districts of Livonia, Southfield, West Bloomfield, Northville and Novi.

Considering both the demographics and financial resources of Farmington community, I don't feel that the taxpayers, the property owners, and least of all the students in the Farmington district, are getting a fair deal.

If I am elected, I will be an effective proponent in considering changes in curriculum and improving student performance as well as enhancing the quality of our schools.

I will attempt to reverse the present school board's system of being reactive rather than proactive in providing a high quality education with a more effective use of school resources.

I will look to concerned parents, proven educational professionals and community leaders for guidance and assistance in the educational process of our children.

**Name:** John Akouri, 23  
Address: Heartstone, Farmington Hills, District resident, 18 years.  
Job: student, MBA candidate at Lawrence Technological University, Southfield.  
Family: single.  
Education: bachelor of arts degree, Wayne State University; Farmington Public Schools graduate.  
Community: Republican precinct delegate, 1988; member, Farmington Hills Committee to Increase Voter Participation Committee, 1989; Community Center Farmington-Farmington Hills Board of Directors, 1989; producer, local access cable television, since 1985; St. Fabi-an video team, since 1988; member, Farmington Area Republican Club; member, county committee for Republican Committee of Oakland County.



**John Akouri**  
challenger

rollment on an intra-district basis. An open enrollment policy between schools within the same district has been successfully implemented in many school districts both to give families a choice between education alternatives and to act as a catalyst for school improvement. It also has a long history as a mechanism to help achieve school desegregation.

Open enrollment policies are consistent with a philosophy of giving complete and specific information to participants in the educational process that have the greatest accountability for the process: the students, their families and successful classroom teachers.

Successful open enrollment policies are associated with programs that give families not only a choice but an informed and free choice. The choice should be made based on complete and specific information on each school and program with respect to student performance, curriculum, goals and standards.

The choice should be free in that open enrollment should not be an excuse for allowing additional cuts in a full curriculum at each school and in that neighborhood schools should be allowed to become over-crowded.

4. What is your opinion on open enrollment policies among schools in different districts?

Experiments in open enrollment throughout the country most recently in Minnesota. In Minnesota, students can attend any school in any district that will accept them. The tax funding follows each student. Although the plan was opposed by most Minnesota school boards, administrators and unions, the plan enjoys increasing public support.

I have an open mind on the policy and that we should study the results of programs currently in operation.

5. What is your opinion of the Highmeadow Common Campus pilot project? What do you propose for the future, in relation to this?

I believe the concept of magnet schools, or so-called "common campuses" to meet the special needs of students, is a good idea. I also believe a school dedicated to a curriculum for the high operative student would also be a good idea. However, Highmeadow is a pilot program and its success or failure vis-a-vis alternative programs in the district must be objectively and professionally measured.

Although a large group of Highmeadow parents strongly support the program at the school, there are other Highmeadow parents that have expressed concerns about the project, particularly that a curriculum for the high operative student was not implemented.

Before expanding the program, I would prefer to evaluate the Highmeadow program in specific, measurable terms and involve a variety of measures, including the use of standardized testing at all grade levels.

6. What is your philosophy about releasing information that may relate to attorney-client privilege? About dealing with taxpayers of the district?

Unless information that relates to attorney-client privilege relates directly to specific litigation, I view that the community and not the school board is, in fact, the client.

If an attorney's opinion is cited and publicized by the board or administrator to influence the public as it was in the recent middle election, the public deserves to get that information first-hand in an unequivocal and timely manner.

In general, taxpayers deserve to see that their tax dollars are wisely spent and I would welcome taxpayer and citizen involvement in our schools.

Not only should school statistics and data (e.g. all financial data, budgets, student performance) be released to the public, that release should be facilitated to encourage such review. I believe this is characteristic of good government.

Monday, May 22, 7 p.m. at O.E. Dunckel Middle School, 32000 Thomas Street, Farmington Hills. Co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters-West Bloomfield/Farmington Area and the American Association of University Women-Farmington Chapter.

This year's race has the largest number of candidates since a school board election in 1985, when a record 14 candidates filed to fill two open seats.

Farmington trustees are paid \$30 per meeting attended. The district includes all of the city of Farmington, much of the city of Farmington Hills and a portion of West Bloomfield Township.

**W**HY ARE you running for the Farmington Board of Education?

Four years ago, I answered this question by saying I felt a deep sense of loyalty and commitment to the Farmington community and its schools, and that I believed as a former educator, I could contribute to the continued stability of our current educational program.

During my four-year term, much has happened in our schools. We hired a new superintendent. We have returned to a district of growth. We are building a new school for the first time in many years.

We recaptured a school because of growth, a pilot common campus school was initiated with good results, an encouraging curriculum and staff development program is in place, and for 1989-90, an open school concept is being offered for our senior high schools.

I feel now that I must stay the course and support these ventures to their full fruition.

2. What is your philosophy on the role of public education?

Education is a function of the state as defined in the federal Constitution and, therefore, is subject to control and direction through the state Legislature. Inherent in this form of control is the belief that public education must be impartial, secular, non-partisan and classless.

The local school board has a mandate to provide equal educational opportunities for all students. At no time should the control of public education be far from the people.

The outstanding strength of public education is that as long as it is kept close to the people, there should be no worry about the perpetuation of our democratic way of life.

3. What is your opinion on open enrollment policies among schools in the same district?

I supported the open enrollment recommendation for our senior high schools beginning with the 1989-90

school year. I favor an annual evaluation of this policy.

4. What is your opinion on open enrollment policies among schools in different districts?

In my opinion, what has happened in the state of Minnesota is truly remarkable. But we should remember that this landmark educational achievement was the result of the leadership of one person, Gov. Rudy Perpich.

"Public school choice" is a popular school reform concept, but the jury is still out on whether it is the panacea for all school problems.

**Name:** John Cotton, 65.  
Address: Oakland Street, Farmington, District resident, 41 years.  
Job: owner, The Turkel Agent, Birmingham; retired athlete; director, Farmington schools; retired college professor, Wayne State University.  
Family: wife, Lois; four married children.  
Education: Wayne State University, bachelor's degree, 1947, and master's degree, 1953; education specialty earned, 1967.  
Community: serving first term on Farmington Board of Education, current president; founding board member and past president, Farmington YMCA; ruling elder, Redford Presbyterian Church, 24 years; Salvation Army, Farmington Advisory Board; Michigan Athletic Director of the Year, 1975; founding board member and first president, Michigan Fellowship of Christian Athletes.



**John Cotton**  
Incumbent

5. What is your opinion of the Highmeadow Common Campus pilot project? What do you propose for the future, relating to this?

The Highmeadow project was an imaginative program created during a time of despair. An attempt at redistricting students was not popular - the superintendent and staff proposed the common campus, and the rest is history.

Highmeadow is a two-year pilot

program. At first blush, it appears to be very successful. We must remember, however, that to a degree, we have a manufactured environment with an unusual amount of ingredients we do not find in our neighborhood schools.

The Highmeadow concept is not for everyone. Many administrators, teachers and parents would not function comfortably in that setting. An improved traditional school environment is their goal.

We must take what is best in this program and infuse those qualities into our traditional school program.

6. What is your philosophy about releasing information that may relate to attorney-client privilege? About dealing with taxpayers of the district?

Privileged information does not have to be released. Extreme caution must be exercised in protecting certain personnel and student records.

In the final analysis, all requests for information should be judged on their own merit and a decision made based on the facts in the matter.

**W**HY ARE you running for the Farmington Board of Education?

I am running for the board of education because I believe the Farmington school system, being the property of all the citizens of the Farmington Public School District, should serve the interests of all the citizens of the school district.

I do not believe that the general public, who pay for the Farmington Public School District, should be told that they cannot publicly question members of the board of education or school administration officials. Nor do I believe that the parents of students should be prohibited from observing classroom activities or denied the opportunity to inspect the curriculum.

I do not believe that a board of education of a school administration should draw a veil of secrecy over its activities, denying the general public information that is distributed to select groups of preferred citizens, withholding it because the lack of a full curriculum at individual schools and, in the light of the board of education's "sibling preference policy," would be used to accord superior educational benefits to self-serving special interest groups.

It would be far better for all concerned to have equally excellent education throughout a district than to have open enrollment. I propose that as a goal for the Farmington Public School District.

**Name:** Robert Ranney, 36.  
Address: Greening Road, Farmington Hills, District resident, 14 months.  
Job: engineer, Michigan Consolidated Gas Co.  
Family: wife, Lisa; two children ages 2 and 5.  
Education: bachelor of science degree, mechanical engineering.  
Community: member, board of directors, Houston Chapter, American Society of Mechanical Engineers, 1986-87; arrangements chairman, 1987 Offshore Technology Conference.



**Robert Ranney**  
challenger

2. What is your philosophy on the role of public education?

An education is one of the few imperishable gifts we parents can grant our children. It is a gift that, once granted, can never be taken from them. For this reason we, as parents, should do our best to secure an excellent education for them.

It is unquestionably in the interest of our nation, both socially and economically, to have an educated public. Thus, the parents and the public have a shared interest in the education of all children.

Public education should be all students, not just the brightest, not just the average. The public school system should challenge all students and frustrate none.

3. What is your opinion on open enrollment policies among schools in the same district?

It is my opinion that a competent school board or administration would be able to provide high quality education uniformly throughout a district the size of ours. A strong movement of parents to place their children in, or remove their children from, public school indicates a serious imbalance in educational quality within the district.

I would support a limited open enrollment policy, except that I fear it could be used to excuse the lack of a full curriculum at individual schools and, in the light of the board of education's "sibling preference policy," would be used to accord superior educational benefits to self-serving special interest groups.

It would be far better for all concerned to have equally excellent education throughout a district than to have open enrollment. I propose that as a goal for the Farmington Public School District.

4. What is your opinion on open enrollment policies among schools in different districts?

I do not favor open enrollment between schools in different districts. The emergence of such a movement within a district indicates the failure of that district's educational system. The voters in a failing school district should remove, via elections, those responsible for the failure, rather than placing their children in public school districts supported by more conscientious citizens.

Regrettably, I see the seeds of such a movement here. Our average SAT scores are below the Michigan average, despite our per student expense being the 11th highest in the state. If the quality of our education does not improve and the parents are made to feel powerless, you may expect pressure for open enrollment on an inter-district basis.

5. What is your opinion of the Highmeadow Common Campus pilot project? What do you propose for the future, in relation to this?

The Highmeadow pilot project has demonstrated the parental enthusiasm that can be generated by the se-

rious efforts of educators striving to deliver excellent education. This lesson should not be lost.

It is unfortunate that the majority of the openings at Highmeadow are now filled by the children of parents who sought special treatment for their offspring at the expense of the general school population. I believe that educational resources should be allocated equitably, and, therefore, cannot support the continuation of the project unless the admission procedures are changed.

6. What is your philosophy about releasing information that may relate to attorney-client privilege? About dealing with taxpayers of the district?

I believe that governmental bodies should withhold information from the general public only when it is unquestionably necessary to do so, and never merely to conceal mistakes. In the case of attorney-client privilege, information should only be withheld in the case of, and only for the duration of, ongoing negotiations and litigation.

The current administration has actively resisted releasing data necessary to confirm compliance with board resolutions, and delayed the release of the minutes of board meetings. It has also been reported to me that the Central Office has resisted the disclosure of the average SAT scores for the school district.

The current board of education treats the taxpayers with contempt, acting more like rulers than public servants. It should never be forgotten that the taxpayers of the Farmington Public School District own the school system and everything in it. They should be treated accordingly.