

# Opinion

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## District agenda Tough issues facing schools

**O**UR SCHOOLS, the lifeblood of our community, are at a pivotal crossroads. With a growing enrollment, a changing administration and a spiraling budget, the Farmington school board will have plenty of homework as it tackles the educational challenges of a new decade.

One of the state's most highly regarded districts, Farmington Public Schools nonetheless faces a tough assignment in trying to meet public demands while trying to contain operating costs. From our vantage point as an objective school board watcher, we see the 11,000-student district's agenda for the '90s including:

- **Graduation rate** — Stiffening graduation requirements is no way to stem the dropout rate, but both are a must if the district is to graduate well-educated students. As the competitiveness of life intensifies, so must the district's resolve to raise student learning skills to a higher level.

- **Substance abuse** — The "Say No To Drugs, Say Yes To Life" T-shirt drive raised community awareness, but the teenage drug problem persists in a far more alarming way than most parents will admit. The district needs to assert more active leadership and not rely on other community groups, like Farmington Families in Action.

- **Attendance boundaries** — As soon as practical, the four middle schools should be open to students who live anywhere in the district, just as the three senior highs are. We envision elementary-level attendance boundaries also falling once enrollment stabilizes, enrichment classes are equalized and class-size equity is assured.

- **Central office** — Bluntly put, the lines of responsibility in the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center are blurred and, in some cases, indistinguishable. A clearer chain of command is a must.

- **Gifted education** — The goal of the evolving program for gifted students should be to strive to meet not only parental expectations, but also, and more importantly, the individual needs of high achievers. We eagerly await a gifted committee report early next year.

*Taxpayer confidence, parental involvement and open communication must be bywords for the '90s.*

- **Common campus** — Parental and staff excitement aside, Highmeadow Common Campus, which offers special enrichment classes beyond the regular elementary curriculum, must undergo a meticulous review when the two-year pilot program ends in June. The program no doubt should be integrated into the elementary curriculum but the big question is how. When the novelty fades, enrichment alone won't sustain it. Meanwhile, magnet programs in non-lottery schools should be seriously considered to spread the "common campus" philosophy.

- **Building repairs** — Overshadowed by planning for a new west-side elementary school and districtwide removal of PCB and asbestos, the other repair needs identified in last year's unsuccessful building-improvement bond vote are still with us. Updated lighting, ceiling tiles, floor covers and electrical service are essential to providing an inviting learning environment.

- **High technology** — The district must remain on the cutting edge of computers and other high-tech teaching tools if it's going to keep pace in the classroom. We're encouraged by the technology advisory committee's work, but the district must do more to involve businesses and parents in this key area.

- **Public trust** — Taxpayer confidence, parental involvement and open communication must be bywords for the '90s.

- **Finance reform** — School finance reform is coming. Spending must reflect that because the exact kind of reform is not yet known. The impact in Farmington is likely to be substantial.

- **Equal opportunity** — The district's commitment to equal opportunity for all students — college prep, job bound, bilingual, special ed — must never waver.

## Theater violence Let police officers do their job

**W**AS A people wouldn't hesitate a moment to send in a taxpayer-paid militia to keep a library open.

Defending residents' rights to experience free expression of ideas at a movie theater is just as vital.

But a shooting at the Southfield Americana Nov. 17 is a frightening example of how that right is jeopardized.

The incident lends the list of violent confrontations and minor skirmishes at area theaters. If we allow this violence to continue, we will snuff out one of the best and brightest forms of expression in our country.

Everyone, by now, knows the incident in question. During a late evening showing of Eddie Murphy's new movie, "Harlem Nights," a man walked down an aisle carrying a handgun. His first shot inside the theater ended in a shootout with police in the parking lot.

Three people were shot and a woman was hit by a car as she ran away.

IN A COUNTRY founded on free expression, the public must be given access to all movies and allowed to formulate its own collective opinions. If this violence continues, theater owners will shy away from showing or handling movies with even a lick of gunplay. After that, any film will be shelved if it contains language some consider questionable.

Ultimately, film topics and themes will come under attack, particularly if they are of a political nature.

Neither "Silkwood" nor "All the President's Men" would have been made in such an atmosphere.

Most of the films that regularly play at the Maple in Bloomfield would be blacklisted. Pretty soon, Don Knott's movies will rise from the slime and we will be forever condemned to watching bad films about talking dolphins.

This isn't the way to go.

Solutions do exist.

In the short term, let the professional law enforcement officers do their job for a designated period. Hiring rental cops really only creates an illusion of security. Residents want real safety.

Secondly, society must stop turning its back on

the underclass. A segment of society armed with weapons is a desperate group of people seeking recognition, status and a way to survive.

The persons with power and influence must work harder in providing education and opportunities for those who have turned to drugs and guns as a way of life.

If the powerful refuse to shoulder this responsibility, the violence will only increase and all the police and jails in the world won't make a difference.

No one is faulting the Americana management for hiring a private security force, but it lacks the impact and authority of recognized law enforcement officers.

Initially, the false bravado of someone carrying a gun is more likely to melt if he knows someone is there to shoot back.

Also, Southfield's police are highly trained in conflict management and less likely to create or compound a bad situation.

This situation wouldn't have to be, or should it be, permanent. But if it is necessary to protect our Constitutional rights, then that duty should fall on the taxpayers, through the police. This very public burden shouldn't be shouldered alone by the theater management.

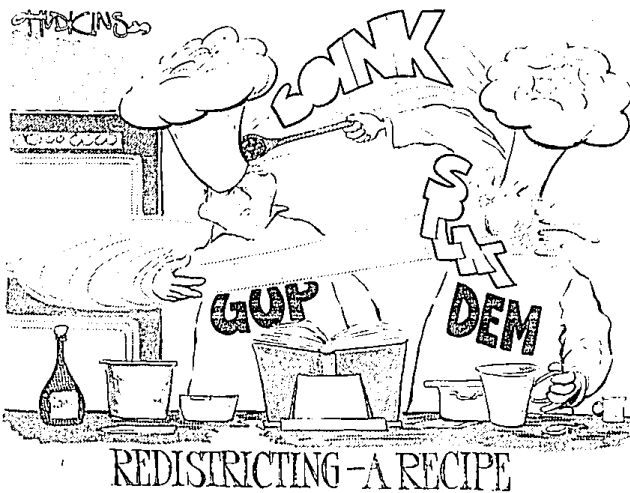
But residents shouldn't be led away from the social significance of this issue and be distracted by ancillary concerns.

- Is this incident fodder for those who advocate handgun registration? Probably not. Law-abiding people tend to register handguns now.

- In general, banning the right to own guns invites exposure and attack of our other constitutionally guaranteed rights, such as freedom of expression — the one we're talking about here.

- Is this incident fodder for racists? It shouldn't be. The people involved in the Southfield shooting were black. The armed people who tore theaters apart when "Colors" was playing on the West Coast were white.

- Was the content of the film itself responsible? Let's look at another question with no clear answer: Do war toys make children violent? Everyone has experts on all sides of each issue, and they're all missing the point.



## Drive-in recycling — make it a family affair

**CALL IT** trash. But consider it reusable in the name of a safer, cleaner environment.

Old newspapers, tin or metal cans, non-deposit glass bottles and jars, waste oil, car and household batteries, high-density plastics.

They're the byproducts of today's throwaway society.

That changed a bit this past July with the opening of drive-in recycling centers in both Farmington and Farmington Hills.

"This is a first step," I remember city manager Bill Costick saying before the ribbon was cut at Farmington Hills' recycling center.

I attended that ribbon-cutting but, like most people, was slow to react to drive-in recycling, which banks on volunteer support.

Curb-side recycling appeals to me more than pay for that convenience. But it's probably two years away.

So it's off to the recycling center twice a month, my family decided. Making that decision was easy. Collecting and separating recyclables from the daily trash was the hard part.

SO FAR, my family has made four trips to the Hills recycling center, with newspapers and high-density plastics in tow.



Bob Sklar

We've recycled many of the non-deposit glass bottles and jars ourselves, using them to store household items.

The key to making the recycling commitment? Getting everyone in a household involved, including the kids. Making it a family affair removes the drudgery and provides a built-in motivational tool.

The Farmington area's two recycling centers — at each city's DPW yard — are easy to find, kept up neatly and open to residents of each city. Call your city hall for disposal details.

My family's incentive was the Farmington Hills Department of Public Services Recycling Center brochure.

It reads: "Recycling reduces landfill expenses, protects the environment and preserves resources for future generations." It adds, "Michigan residents generate enough garbage each day to completely fill

the Pontiac Silverdome."

In the wake of rocketing landfill costs and an ever-growing market for recyclables, we were hooked. Heck, we felt it was our civic duty. In the last decade, the cost of solid waste disposal per cubic yard has shot up 1,400 percent locally.

**DID YOU** know that Farmington Hills residents collectively produce 125 tons of rubbish each day?

Experts say up to 40 percent of this waste stream is recyclable and could be redirected away from landfills and incinerators. Up to 10 percent of this total waste is compostable.

So it's not surprising that in addition to curbside recycling, Farmington and Farmington Hills are looking into processing grass clippings and leaves into reusable compost material.

With landfill dumping costs ranging from \$25 per ton locally to \$100 per ton out East, it's a pocketbook issue as much as an ecological issue," says Farmington city manager Bob Deadman.

Reduce the waste stream and you not only give nature a hand, you save yourself money. It's that simple.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

## 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.

## Logic — way off target

To the editor:

The story on the front page of the Nov. 27 issue was amazing.

The staff writer described the Farmington school board president's desire to ask the trustees to end their \$12,000 to \$16,000 national search for a new superintendent in favor of appointing the acting superintendent to the post.

This letter is not pro or con the acting superintendent. Rather, this letter is to highlight the logic, or rationale, used by the board president to favor the appointment — and reasons for questioning the appointment given by trustee Ditzhazy.

The board president is quoted as saying staff (i.e., employees) and community are pleased with the acting superintendent's leadership. That sounds like the board president can be influenced by the kind of popularity contests that are used to name athletes to All-Star games and elect homecoming queens.

Trustee Ditzhazy questions the appointment because the acting superintendent lacks classroom teaching experience and an earned doctorate.

But the fact is, nobody has ever established that teaching experience and/or doctorates make better superintendents. (We do know, however, that these artificial criteria can be used to screen out people who are not wanted for other reasons.)

It sure would be refreshing (and encouraging) to see our elected "leaders" focus on issues such as:

- Increasing student learning skills (the 3Rs, speaking, study skills, etc.)

- Higher graduation rates (e.g., decreasing the drop outs).

- Better parent involvement (e.g., meaningful increases in the single most critical variable associated with quality schools).

- Cost controls (we know that more money does not necessarily mean better schools).

- Deadwood (how can we get rid of bad teachers and lethargic staff).

Come on "leaders." Popularity is not the issue. Nice guys are a dime-a-dozen. North Central is not relevant. North Central is a "gate keeper" concerned with self-serving inputs — not results.

An annual salary of \$100,000 (plus extensive fringes) ought to be worth a superintendent who is willing to guarantee results.

You should be focusing on a specific list of the most critical results you expect the new person to deliver over the next four to eight years. What are they?

John Miller,  
Farmington Hills

## Dilemma is all-year issue

To the editor:

As correctly noted by the Observer in the Nov. 30 editorial ("Christmas Spat"), the last few Christmas seasons have been tumultuous ones.

It is questionable, however, whether the solution you posed is a viable one.

While the goal of teaching children about different cultures and religions is certainly worthwhile, this teaching needs to take place throughout the school year, not only during the month of December.

An upcoming communitywide panel discussion will address the "December Dilemma" from the perspective of a Christian clergyman, a school administrator and a municipal official.

Audience members will be given the opportunity to ask questions and share their perspectives.

The program will take place on Monday, Dec. 11 at 7 p.m. at Temple Israel, 5725 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield, and is sponsored by the Jewish Community Council. The public is invited at no charge.

Let us hope that this December, rather than creating a conflict between "us" and "them," we can maintain the spirit of harmony and goodwill this season should represent.

David Gad-Harf,  
executive director,  
Jewish Community Council  
of Metropolitan Detroit

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