

# Choice — today's buzzword

GONE ARE the days when everyone simply did as they were told. Today's children have minds of their own, and so do their parents. It's a different era. Everyone knows what they want and they want it now.

They want choices. Decisions about lives, family structure and career are all key. So are decisions about education, the basis for all of these. "Choice" has become a popular buzzword in education. It's about time.

Members of the business-funded, Detroit-area research organization Metropolitan Affairs Corp. have been talking about it since 1984. They believe giving children different opportunities and different choices will spawn a better generation of young adults — the future leaders of our nation and the world.

Those running the state of Minnesota have taken on the lead. They've given students and their parents a choice throughout the state about what schools they can attend.

EVEN IN Farmington, students in grades 9-12 can choose which high school they wish to attend. One middle school, Warner, accepts students from across the district. But this



**Casey Huns**

limited open enrollment policy was not approved for the sake of progress. It was done to halt the juggling of students between various schools, and allow the overcrowding at one or two schools to adjust itself.

What about offering a choice because it's the right thing to do? And how about choice at all levels?

While the general populace across the country is busy railing on the education system, educators are searching for ways to make things better. Politicians are wringing their hands, seeking ways to stabilize curriculum and cost, discourage dropouts and generally improve public education.

Perhaps it's time to try something different. A little bit of competition, that good old-fashioned concept upon which our capitalistic society is based, might do the trick.

JUST LOOK at what has hap-

pened with the introduction of High-meadow Common Campus. The program, and some of the very active parents, have been criticized for being elitist. Perhaps that's nothing but jealousy over a program that offers students much more than they have ever had before.

I'm not advocating a massive choice program statewide — yet. One within our own district, at all levels, would do the job.

There's currently a program of choice at the kindergarten level in Farmington. Parents can send their children to a neighborhood elementary school kindergarten, or to a centralized program in an early childhood center.

Competition is good for such programs, and children get nothing except benefits.

The citizen panel that just finished studying the Farmington elementary school boundaries might put a price out on my head, but I propose it's time to look past the boundary issue and back to our future.

Let's not appoint an ongoing boundary study committee, but one to study other options. Education should be everyone's choice.

Casey Huns is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

## Charges magnify school inequity

THERE BUT for the grace of God go I.

That's how I felt about Annette Evans-Lee, the mother who faces criminal charges of falsifying documents and obtaining goods and services under false pretenses so her 16-year-old daughter could attend a better school.

If I loved my child, saw his or her potential, was in a deficient, under-schooled system and was blocked by a myriad of things — economics, racism, my own inadequacies — what would I do?

The Southfield case reiterates loudly and clearly the inequities in our school system, which Michigan's power structure refuses to correct.

It shows our overwhelming "no" votes on Proposals A and B — which didn't have all the answers either — back in our faces. And it tells the Michigan Legislature once more time that the inequities in our schools, which foster and preserve the inequities in life, will come back to haunt us.

NO, ANNETTE Evans-Lee didn't do the right thing; she didn't do a wise thing. But she did a very human



**Judith Doner Berne**

thing. She tried to get a better education for her child. By doing so, she may have misrepresented herself and used, without contributing to, Southfield tax dollars.

But hers is a criminal offense in the eyes of the Southfield Public Schools, which for the first time has filed criminal charges in a non-residency case.

"Why are we the only ones being picked on?" said daughter Tara, a junior who was dropped as a student last week. "They've kicked another 100 kids out (for not meeting residency requirements) and nothing else happened to them. Why aren't the other 100 here in court? This is not called for."

Her mother, too, lashed out. "They picked me out because I'm a black person. I have not killed anybody.

I'm not a criminal. I am a concerned parent. All I want is for my child to have a good education.

I DON'T believe Southfield school officials picked Evans-Lee because she is black. Certainly, other parents — black and white — have misrepresented their residency in this and other affluent, suburban school districts. They, too, were trying to give their child the biggest gift, next to love — the gift of a good education.

School district officials maintain this case is different and warrants the criminal charges. They need to prove that — beyond a shadow of a doubt. Because just having their fill of illegal enrollments and deciding to make an example of one isn't good enough.

But, of course, the issue is bigger than Evans-Lee and the Southfield Public Schools. The issue is why do people have to resort to lies to get a quality education for their children? We continue to fail to deal with that.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer and Eclectic Newspapers.

## points of view

### More letters to the editor . . .

#### Mayor-elect backs library

To the editor:

May I correct an error which is floating around the city and which appeared in print in this space?

We do not know who M. Power "called to ask" about the library parcel, but it is untrue that "the city would not allow the library to take any more central parcels zoned commercial off the tax roll . . . would only allow their library to have land zoned residential."

This proposition was never presented to the city, city council or other body of which I am aware.

The answer is economics. If there were centrally located land available which there is not, and if the library board voted to relocate the library on it, it would cost a minimum of \$220,000 to \$300,000 an acre and up.

Land further west on 12 Mile Road, on the north side of the road, costs \$150,000 an acre. So for a minimum of 10 acres, one can figure the total savings.

As mayor-elect, I wholeheartedly endorse the new library proposals. Libraries are basic to civilization.

Jean M. Fox, Farmington Hills

#### Elected mayor the right thing

To the editor:

Having had the opportunity at the recent National League of Cities Conference to discuss common concerns with other mayors and council members, I found your editorial (Nov. 20) on the mayor's role very interesting.

As I arrived at the conference, I had two issues of major interest to me. First, I was interested in how other communities were dealing with illegal alcohol sales to minors, and secondly, how they selected their mayors. On both issues, I had overwhelming support for my position.

I am now even more convinced, contrary to your opinion, the people should elect their spokesman, the

mayor. There is no question in my mind the selection of mayor by council has worked for a small city but we have reached a population of 70,000 plus and we are no longer a small town.

Our changing mayor every 12 months develops absolutely no continuity. It took me four months to develop working relationships and, historically, the mayor does less in the last two months of the year because of the expectation of a new mayor. Nobody can reach their potential in such a short time period.

Of all those I polled at the NLC Conference, all agreed an elected mayor offered more leadership and the residents with their voter influence have more say about direction of their city.

It is a time for our city to put the decision of their mayor in the hands of the voters. It would create more interest in city issues and we could maintain the same form of government. The role of the city manager would not change. I advocate we keep everything the same but elect the mayor directly by the people.

An elected mayor by the people would have more influence in Lansing, Washington, Oakland County and with fellow mayors of our area. With a two-year term, the mayor elected would be forced to respond more to the residents than one in office for four years. There are many issues that a city manager cannot get out from under where political leadership in the community is warranted.

I refuse to blow my own horn but after having participated in selecting the mayor as a council member and working even harder to convince the voters to support a particular candidate in a city election, the will of the people should prevail.

We should put the question of who elects the mayor to the voters and let them decide the issue. Who selects the mayor of Farmington Hills, city council or the people?

Although I displayed an interest for the sake of continuity in seeking appointment as mayor for a second term, it would not be my intention to run for elected mayor due to other personal interests at this time.

Terry Sever, mayor, Farmington Hills

#### 'No Knock' is warranted

To the editor:

The Nov. 9 Farmington Observer editorial critical of Michigan's proposed "No-Knock" legislation fails to recognize that law enforcement needs new and practical tools in the state's war on drugs.

Senate Bill 23 — the "No knock" bill — is designed to achieve two main goals. First, it is designed to reduce the likelihood of police officers getting injured or killed while executing search warrants for illegal drugs.

Second, the bill is designed to let the police recover evidence that would otherwise be destroyed (drugs flushed down the toilet, for example).

Laws are not enacted in a vacuum. They are passed in order to provide new or better responses to community problems or crises.

The proposed "No knock" law is a strong response by the Michigan Senate to the ever-growing drug crisis. "No knock" is a practical, realistic and constitutional tool to help protect the lives of dedicated police officers. Furthermore, it will help law enforcement officers recover incriminating evidence against drug traffickers.

Law enforcement experts recognize that narcotics traffickers often have more powerful weaponry than the police.

Narcotics officers have shared with the Legislature the frustrations of seeing drug dealers repeatedly destroy evidence while officers attempt to comply with all search warrant execution requirements. "No knock" will help remedy this problem. Search warrant executions can take place before the evidence can be flushed away or otherwise destroyed.

We urge the Observer to re-examine its criticism of the proposed "No Knock" bill. Law enforcement's war on drugs in Michigan will be aided greatly by its passage.

William Dwyer, chief of police, Timothy M. Kenny, Crime Advisory Committee, Farmington Hills

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