

Parent objects to district's firearms class

By Darrell Clem
staff writer

Linda Luther was shocked when she learned that her sixth-grade son, a student at Walled Lake Elementary School, would be taught to shoot a .22-caliber rifle next month.

"I couldn't believe it," she said Tuesday. "I was horrified."

Although Luther knew she had the option of pulling her son from the sixth-grade firearms safety program at the Walled Lake Outdoor Education Center in Milford, she hesitated. "I hate to put him on the spot like

Walled Lake School District

that with the other students. I don't want to pull him out of the program," she said. "Most parents seem to think it's OK."

So Luther, who also has a second-grader enrolled in the Walled Lake district, which includes northwest Farmington Hills, decided to object to the firearms program by sending a letter to schools Superintendent

James Geisler.

It won't be the first objection he has heard about the program that was started in the 1950s as a way to teach firearms safety to students in the historically rural school district.

School officials have stressed that the program is not intended to promote violence.

However, that didn't stop an earli-

er lawsuit that parents filed in Oakland County Circuit Court to challenge the firearms program, though the suit was dropped last year after school officials addressed some parent concerns.

For example, firearms instructors now must receive state certification, and students discharging the rifles must wear safety glasses and other protective gear.

However, parent Sam Holman, among those who opposed the program, declared even after the law-

suit was dropped that questions remained about the program's educational value and its "psychological aspects."

Holman criticized school officials for failing to address those concerns and vowed that parents would begin putting political pressure on school board members to justify the program.

Holman reiterated Tuesday that, although the lawsuit has been dropped, the issue is "far from being settled."

Holman plans to ask Walled Lake school officials to put the firearms program on an upcoming school board agenda for discussion, at which time he plans to restate his concerns.

Luther, meanwhile, said she planned to contact Holman and other parents who have fought the program in the past. Luther said she "couldn't fathom" a firearms program in Detroit public schools, and she questioned why suburban schools would tell children not to be violent, yet teach them to shoot rifles.

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