

Opinion

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Insensitive

Be classy with appointments

A LITTLE more class could have — and should have — accompanied the Farmington Hills City Council's process of making board and commission appointments last Monday.

Since community service is at issue, it behooves the mayor, who recommends appointments, and the council, which confirms them, to treat the process sensitively.

It was well within Mayor Jean Fox's purview to recommend reappointments as well as new appointments.

We opposed some of her recommendations to replace volunteers who wanted to continue serving. The council approved only one of five such recommendations. But that's not the issue.

The mayor clearly has the power to recommend new board or commission members. The council is limited to acting on mayoral recommendations.

The yearly change in mayor provides a sort of built-in mechanism to prevent cliques from developing on boards and commissions.

FOX SAID she meant no disrespect. Still, she should have called the five commissioners she sought to replace, telling them of her decision and extending thanks for their dedicated service.

The five found out about their pending replacement by other sources — indeed, a crummy way to show gratitude for a job well done.

A post-appointment letter of commendation, as Fox promised, isn't good enough.

We appreciate Fox's wish to reward service while making room for some of the many talented new people moving into the city.

Thomas Jefferson put it well way back in 1801: "If a due participation of office is a matter of

right, how are vacancies to be obtained? Those by death are few; by resignation, none."

But tact must reign.

In recommending new appointments, the mayor should heed the advice of Mike Horner, the parks and recreation commission secretary she is seeking to replace.

"I feel that every volunteer commissioner deserves to know in advance why his or her commission is not being renewed. I feel that common courtesy would demand a personal communication from the mayor. I feel that six years of service to Farmington Hills deserves more than a clandestine shove out the back door."

MEANWHILE, IF the mayor insists on demanding that council members specify why they oppose an appointment, she, in turn, should specify why she's not recommending a reappointment.

Councilman Jon Grant hit the bull's-eye in saying the council should have more than 48 hours to consider recommended replacements as well as the mayor's reasoning.

Ditto for his thought that perhaps a limit on terms is the best way to assure more-frequent turnover.

A ceremonial mayor shouldn't have absolute power to block a reappointment favored by, say, five other council members.

As Grant put it: "I don't think individuals who serve so tirelessly should have to be concerned with their particular term expiring during a time a mayor is in office who may have a slightly different political perspective on the way the city should go or who perhaps just does not like a particular person."

Revamped terms haunt the halls of modern ed

I've been in education for more than 30 years and keep hearing new terms for things we did years ago. It's like someone gives new wording to a supposedly new education concept, idea or program that has been around before. Do you know what I mean?

Yes, it seems the more things change in education, the more they stay the same.

Keep in mind, however, many of these new education concepts or teaching strategies have been vastly improved, just as today's car is an improvement over the Model T.

Fundamentally, the Model T got one from point A to point B. However, many of the "new" educational ideas are the result of earlier prototypes.

IN SUPPORT of your observation, let us look at cooperative learning, an excellent teaching strategy, big in today's teacher staff development.

Cooperative learning is where students learn in a group setting, sharing knowledge and helping each other in a cooperative venture for the benefit of the entire class.

It is an excellent teaching method that allows the slower learner to be literally tutored by those students who grasp concepts quickly.

It strengthens the brighter learner who reinforces his/her own understanding by acting in a teaching role.

This example supports your contention that new education concepts or teaching strategies may have a new name but many have been around before.

Have we forgotten that the little red brick schoolhouse used cooperative learning, with upper class students tutoring the younger ones, back at the turn of the century?

Doc Doyle

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TODAY, WE have a movement toward higher level thinking, problem solving or logic skills — not just memorizing information and regurgitating it back on a weekly quiz.

This concept is called inductive reasoning in today's education literature. If I recall, Socrates advocated this type of learning very strongly at one time, even unto death via hemlock.

Another of today's education terms is inter-disciplinary approach.

Translated, it means to involve several disciplines (social studies, English, science) for the study of a singular topic. In the 1950s, this was called core curriculum and Wayne State University was a leader in the movement.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE of a rela-

tively new program is mastery learning, a program where a student progresses at his/her own pace.

Bright students move on and slower students are given opportunities and appropriate help to catch up.

Yet in the 1960s, a movement called continuous education progress, with key learning objectives and skills to be mastered at the child's own pace was basically the same concept.

Today we have learning centers with hands-on experience for young elementary students. In the 1950s, we called it exploratory learning.

THE LATEST is the whole language approach where students, infusing reading, writing and language arts into a single learning experience, as opposed to studying each subject separately.

Doesn't this sound like the interdisciplinary approach of the 1970s, which was the first cousin of the core curriculum?

If this sounds cynical, let me close with this. Education is fortunate to have some creative leaders who listen to research and who study the past.

They are the leaders who improve and refine the best known teaching and program strategies for the welfare of children.

They are leaders with a vision who say the Model T was a masterpiece but we can do better.

Dr. James Doyle is the former assistant superintendent in the Troy School District. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle in the Observer & Enterprise Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

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