

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

6A(F)

O&F Monday, March 12, 1990

Open enrollment Allow it but monitor it closely

RISK CAN'T always be avoided. But it can be minimized. Despite fears that Harrison could overload on football stars and spur recruiting charges, the Farmington Board of Education was justified in continuing to open the three senior highs to all students next year, regardless of where they live in the district.

The attendance caps and enrollment timelines the board adopted Tuesday appear to be wise controls. We urge uniformity in treating students when the number of transfer requests exceed available spaces.

The year-old policy not only seems a good way to ease crowding at North Farmington, but also a major step toward stemming provincialism by letting parents at all grade levels have the option to select, within limits, which school they want their children to attend.

Whenever a school district is at the forefront of change, concerns sprout. The trick is to minimize them when the change is merited.

IF RECRUITING, or just an inclination for athletes to gravitate to one school, is a real fear, district administrators and coaches must make darn sure that athletic programs are squeaky clean and able to stand up to scrutiny.

Parents, coaxed by visions of college scholarships, could take advantage of the new policy and move to the district just because of Harrison's football program. But it won't be because of recruiting by coach John Herrington. Even opposing coaches defend his integrity.

Theoretically, Harrison, North and Farmington could recruit each other's star athletes, knowing that landing one key player could mean a swimming or tennis title.

The Farmington High Football Backers say: "The ability to draw athletic talent from an entire district population can put some public

Whenever a school district is at the forefront of change, concerns sprout.

schools in the same 'league' as many of the very successful parochial schools."

But because property taxes go to the district at large, not individual attendance districts, parents should have the option to send children to a school outside their neighborhood if that school is below enrollment capacity and no red flags arise.

History shows most teens prefer their home school, where most of their friends go. Less than 250 students now attend a senior high other than their home school.

THE NEW enrollment policy grew out of Harrison's declining enrollment. A continued decline could jeopardize not only the school's football program but, more importantly, its fine English, physics and math programs.

"Teacher on TV" on cable educational access Channel 10, and busing students to another senior high for specific classes, only partially address the problem of, say, only a few students taking German at one school.

Any evidence of a rush of student athletes to one school, or of academics being affected at a particular school, should lead the school board to reassess the new enrollment policy. Equal learning opportunities can't be compromised.

Before the policy is extended beyond Warner at the middle school level, the school board should await the results of key district studies addressing facilities, gifted education and common campus.

Our underlying belief about limited open enrollment is that facts, not fears, should dictate school board policy.

Early start helps ease bias toward religions

Q: Religious holidays have become an issue for schools, especially in districts where there is a diverse ethnic population.

A: Do you see any hope for education helping students gain a better understanding of issues such as different ethnic groups' religious holiday traditions? Do you see education ever being a force in dealing with the religion issue? What can or should education do?

A: The problem with the religious holiday celebration issue is that education has tended to react rather than act.

We face the issue every Christmas when emotions are at a peak, rather than talking, dealing and planning for the next school year now.

Education is indeed the major vehicle for addressing this issue. However, for any education program to have an impact, it must start in kindergarten or in preschool.

WAITING UNTIL middle school or high school to teach about religious holidays is too late.

By the time they have reached high school, most students have developed a conscious or unconscious mind-set toward other people's beliefs from their uncles, aunts, parents and grandparents that is difficult, if not impossible, to overcome.

I believe a sound multicultural education program is a must, a program that is infused into the curriculum from the child's first day in school.

This program should be developed by educators and reviewed by appropriate representatives from the different religious communities, and should have clear guidelines for teachers.

A GOOD place to start is with religious holidays.

Religious holidays allow teachers a natural vehicle to generate an appreciation for both the differences and similarities of people's beliefs and traditions.

We can teach about the different religious celebrations from themes that show whom people celebrate — an approach that would acknowledge all major religious holidays throughout the year.

Religious groups or children of a specific orientation should put on programs throughout the year for other children to review.

Care must be taken. Good intentions with little knowledge do more harm than good. One poor scenario is

Doc Doyle

to acknowledge Hanukkah, a minor Jewish holiday, in the same light as Christmas.

THE TYPE of program I am referring to would teach facts rather than faith beliefs.

Factual descriptions of what people of different religious orientations believe would be presented with no value judgments. And, never with a teacher's opinion.

The best vehicle would be children demonstrating holiday activities as they have been taught over the years.

Young children do not get into value judgments until we adults teach them our values.

We clearly must teach about all "religious groups" such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, Islam, Confucianism, etc.

I believe we must develop a process and program, not a knee-jerk reaction to a specific religious holiday one time of the year.

WE MUST start from preschool on. It has worked with the cigarette issue.

I was the director of a large federally financed Michigan drug and substance abuse education program during the late 1980s.

We started a "don't use drugs" program at the high school level in 1968, and we have an even more dev-

astating problem today.

We started a "don't smoke cigarettes" program at the kindergarten level in 1968, and just look at the attitudes toward smoking today.

As a former high school teacher and administrator, I've come to realize that any education geared for long-range attitudinal changes must start with our next generation — those in kindergarten now.

Young children learning about each other's religious heritage will make more of a difference than the typical one-hour motivation speaker at the annual high school assembly.

AND, DON'T expect miracles from high school teachers or counselors if they inherit a generation of children with little or no tolerance for another group's religious orientation.

If we haven't laid the foundation for acceptance of other people's religious beliefs when children are 5 years old or younger, it's not going to happen.

If we really desire an understanding of each other's religious traditions and beliefs, start when children's minds are open and fertile for the good seeds.

Call it brainwashing if you wish, but it is better than what we have accomplished to date. This process has worked in all other curriculum areas for instructional leaders who know what curriculum is all about.

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

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5823) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

from our readers

Teaching view is challenged

To the editor:

We just wanted to tell you that you wrote some things about our schools that aren't true (Feb. 26, Opinion Page).

We do learn about the Berlin Wall and Nelson Mandela. We learn about

the current events.

We had a visitor from Germany who told us about the wall before it was torn down. Then our teachers told us it was torn down.

Eight third graders at Highmeadow Common Campus Farmington Hills

Here's the good news.

METROBANK NEWS

	EFFECTIVE ANNUAL YIELD	CURRENT INTEREST RATE
MONEYMARKET ACCOUNT	6.59%	6.4%
1 YEAR TIME CERTIFICATE	8.03%	7.8%

Metrobank

Metropolitan National Bank of Farmington
474-6400

Bank accounts require minimum balances of \$1,000. Money Market accounts compound monthly. Time Certificates compound quarterly and are subject to a substantial interest penalty for early withdrawal. Rates subject to change.

Member FDIC

**Free
Throw
Contest
March 17
11:00 am**

Children 7 to 12 years of age! You can be a real hot shot by entering The Detroit Pistons' Free Throw Contest.

Test your shooting skills and win great prizes including gift certificates, Pistons' tickets and Pistons' merchandise. Prizes will be awarded in 7 to 9 and 10 to 12 year old categories. Winners in each category will compete April 11 when the Pistons play at the Palace of Auburn Hills.

Don't miss this World Championship event at:

WONDERLAND MALL

For more information call 522-4100

Co-Sponsored By The Detroit Pistons Basketball Company

SPONSOR