

Hillside curriculum will stress togetherness

By Casey Hane
Staff writer

Togetherness — that's what Hillside principal Richard Ruter wants to stress at the new west side Farmington Hills elementary school, slated to open this fall.

Students with a variety of needs can all be taught together, he said, without pulling students out of the classroom and causing disruptions and "frustrations for teachers on a daily basis."

"We have a commitment to keeping kids in the classroom as much as possible," he said March 6.

School board member Janice Rolnick, long a champion of the needs of gifted students, questioned the concept that special needs students learn better in a regular setting.

"I'm really concerned about that," she said. "I'm also concerned about

teachers being trained to address gifted students needs."

The board is not expected to take any official action on the proposed curriculum.

THE NEW 600-student elementary will have basic core classes of language arts, math, social studies, science, health, art, music and physical education, but special and enrichment courses will also be offered separately, likely in the afternoon.

Also new is the introduction of hands-on early childhood concepts in grades kindergarten through two, in a wing of the school set aside for those grades.

Hillside will use some of the concepts currently in use at Highmeadow Common Campus, although modified, said Judith White, assistant superintendent for curriculum and staff development. Highmeadow, a two-year pilot program,

has core classes in the morning and elective enrichments in the afternoon.

"It will be somewhat similar to Highmeadow," she said. "But they're going to go slower at it. They're not going to offer as many (enrichments). That's not to say we don't have enrichments in other buildings — it does not mean that."

"The difference is its not imbedded in courses through the day."

Superintendent Michael Flanagan explained that the district is "trying to glean the best of what's in all the schools," and that the district will expand whatever programming that works. "The best that comes out of Hillside will, voluntarily, be accepted into other buildings," he added.

A COMMITTEE of 38 Farmington school staff and parents worked on developing the program for Hillside

over the past months. One said the curriculum was designed to meet a variety of student needs.

"The key word is flexibility," she said. "We should be able to make adaptations right along the way."

Elementary teacher and committee member Linda Weh told board members "there's a lot of excitement" about the new program

throughout the district. "Any teacher that buys into Hillside will come there with a great deal of enthusiasm, to get the job done in a wonderful way."

One parent whose child will attend Hillside said the programs at Highmeadow and Hillside are sparking interest in the parent community as well. "Other parents are jealous,"

she said, "and are asking that these models be brought to their school."

She called the new curriculum a "Cradbrook without the megabucks."

Other parents stressed the need for evaluating the new program, to determine how well it works.

The building of Hillside is slated to be completed in mid-August.

Hills' bond ratings improve

Two Farmington Hills bond ratings have been upgraded, which will mean a significant interest saving for taxpayers, city finance director Charles Rosch announced Monday.

Moody's Investors Service, a New York-based national bond rating agency, has upgraded the city's rating on unlimited tax obligation bonds from A to AA and on limited tax obligation bonds from A to A1.

On a \$10 million bond paid over 15 years, city taxpayers will realize a \$300,000 total interest saving, Rosch said.

Only 12 other Michigan cities have the AA rating. No Michigan city has an A1 rating, which is the highest, Rosch said.

"We don't go out and obtain this in any other way than to be a responsible city government that pays its bill

on time," Mayor Jean Fox said in congratulating Rosch at the city council meeting Monday.

The upgrading came in conjunction with the city's sale of \$400,000 in special assessment bonds Monday.

The city's tax base, relative wealth, low unemployment, retiring debt, sound budgeting and financial planning were among the factors Moody's cited.

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