

Students take first-hand government lessons

WHO SAYS teenagers are any different than adults?

Farmington high school students found themselves in the same dilemma during the annual Student Government Day Dec. 11 as the Farmington Hills City Council finds itself in almost every Monday night. "They couldn't make up their

mind any more than the real city council could," said Harrison American government teacher Richard Steele, who works with the Student Government Day program. That was on the discussion of what to do with the city-owned Peltz-MDOT property south of I-696, west of Farmington Road. Sponsored by the Farmington Rotary Club, the program is designed

to give the high school students a taste of local government. The students assume positions of their adult counterparts, such as mayor, police chief, city manager, district judge, public services director and city clerk.

Both Steele and Steve Brock, assistant to the Farmington Hills city manager, who organizes the program in the city, agree that this year's topics for discussion during the mock council election were better than ever before. William Brinkner is Steele's counterpart at North Farmington High School.

IN ADDITION to the Peltz-MDOT issue, the students debated the pros and cons of the city mandating recycling.

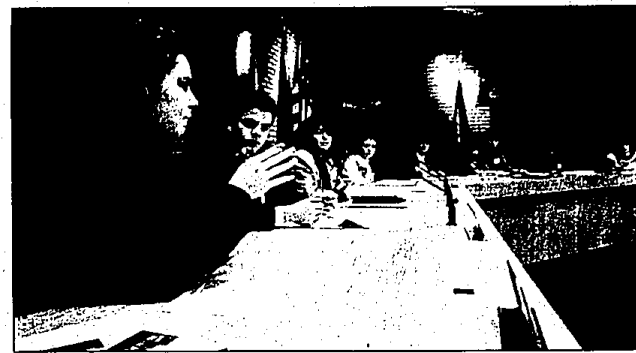
"It was difficult to reach a consensus on either topic," Brock said.

In fact, students ran out of time and never got to the third topic, which was picking three priorities out of the city's Year 2000 plan.

"They (students) were interesting, inquisitive and intelligent with their discussions," Brock said. "They hit on a lot of the same issues the usual city council does."

One thing, however, was different. There was an absence of political posturing and power plays. But Steele didn't chalk that absence up to youthful innocence.

"In one day they didn't have enough time to get into their power groups. If they kept at it, within



photos by SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

North Farmington student Karen Zelenko, acting as city clerk, joins the fracas during the mock council meeting.

three or four days they would get into their power groups," Steele said.

Before the mock council meeting, the students spent the first part of the day with their adult counterparts to get a feel for the various jobs in the city and what it takes to run the city.

Students for the most part requested the position they wished to play. "Some of them have a law background, so they wanted to be the judge or city attorney," Steele said.

Because there are so many forms of local government, Student Government Day is one way of teaching

students the differences — especially from state and federal government.

"In school, they learn about the federal and state governments. Local government is a little more difficult to pin down," Brock said.



A lot of it is listening as Harrison student Sara Paul, acting as mayor, and North Farmington student Lynn Patel, as mayor pro tem, find during a mock city council election on Student Government Day Dec. 11.

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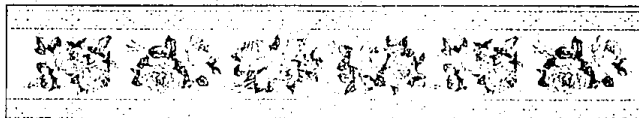
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