

County business leaders asked to aid schools

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Local schools are being hit by a triple whammy — more to teach, a more competitive world and more social problems in the classroom.

Those themes arose in speech after speech during a Leadership Oakland conference Jan. 16th sponsored by the Council of Chambers of Commerce of Oakland County, Inc.

"Apathy, lack of involvement by parents, parochialism" are a major problem, concluded one discussion

group among the 46 business and governmental managers.

"More parental involvement but less parental pressure" are needed, suggested another group.

POPPING UP most often was the problem of family structure — single parents, divorce, two working parents.

"Only 41 percent of our children will ever reach 18 without some sort of divided family structure," said keynoter Lillian Bauder, president of the Cranbrook Educational Facility.

"The family structure is important to support education."

Carl Cohen, former Troy school board president and Michigan PTA president, said the lack of traditional families — working father, homemaker mother, kids — means there are "far fewer volunteers in the pool" to help schools.

To make matters worse, he said, "Schools don't welcome parents. They put up signs saying, 'All visitors report to the office.'"

Cohen urged business to take greater interest in schools, releasing

employees "one hour per person per month" for school-related activities.

PARENTS ARE sources of both strength and stress to Bloomfield Hills teachers, said union president Samantha Huetenik.

There is incredible pressure (on students) to go to an Ivy League school," she said.

She drew gasps from the audience with the story of a Bloomfield Hills mother who refused to let her son repeat kindergarten because it would reduce his earning power by a year.

Sylvia Whitmer, curriculum director of Birmingham schools, said family turmoil is caused by "divorce, abuse, neglect, tired parents, mental illness and the drug culture."

"Some people want us to teach everything — courtesy, values, health

"The next caller says, 'You're going too far,'" said Whitmer.

A NATION with growing non-readership will have trouble in a world economy, several speakers said.

"Students are being entertained at a fast pace by television. We have

to go against MTV," said Christy Hicks, a North Farmington High graduate attending Oakland University and planning to become a teacher.

"We watch too much TV in this country, and it's killing us. We've got to patrol it," said John Schultz, superintendent of Rochester schools.

Bauder of Cranbrook cited 13 percent illiteracy in the United States, aggravated by a "growing division of the haves and have-nots" — a large underclass of unemployed and unemployable.

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