

Changing times

County's technical schools pursue older students

By Darrell Pressley
staff writer

Declining enrollment in its four technical education centers has forced the Oakland Intermediate School District to downsize and sometimes close classes, and to look beyond the county's high schools for students.

The four technical centers, which provide courses in marketing, science, trade technology, robotics and other occupations, formerly were devoted to educating students from the county's public high schools.

But to combat the decrease in high school students, the centers are trying harder to recruit post-graduates and adults.

The problem of enrollment stems from a lack of high school students in the state, said David Soule, director of vocational technical education for the Board of Education of Oakland Schools.

The program, which began in 1971, has lost 100,000 students in the 20-year period, Soule said.

The student numbers aren't there to draw from. We're going to have to watch constantly and make adjustments," he said.

IN THE PAST, Oakland Schools' four technical centers were required to have 75 percent of their capacity for two of the four semesters. But those capacities have been lowered

from 20-22 to 18 students, Soule said. A class with fewer than 10 students won't be held.

• The Southwest Oakland Technical Center in Walled Lake, which serves the West Bloomfield, Walled Lake and Farmington school districts, recently had to close 10 classes.

Nine of the 13 extended day sessions have been closed. And two of three machine technical courses were also closed, said John Xenos, principal of the Walled Lake center. Enrollment this year was 804 students, down from 1,250 in 1985, Xenos said.

• The Northwest Oakland Technical Center in Clarkston, which serves Rochester, closed a medical assistant and computer-assisted accounting class because of under-enrollment, said Dan Manthorpe, principal.

In 1986, there were 3,255 high school students in the area to recruit from. In 1990, there were 4,301. Enrollment in this year is 668, down from 727 students in 1986, Manthorpe said.

The modifications made to the enrollment requirements enable us to maintain programs with fewer students, Manthorpe said.

Though there is a concern that the number of students is declining, the bigger concern is the vocational programs are not being taken advantage of, Manthorpe said.

"Traditionally, during times of economic stress we find more adults coming back to school."

• The Southeast Oakland Technical Center in Royal Oak, serving Bloomfield Hills, Southfield, Birmingham and Troy districts, has the largest adult enrollment of any of the centers, according to principal John Daenzer.

Of 927 students enrolled this year, 322 are adults.

Though the percentage of high school students have increased, there still aren't enough students, which is a concern, Daenzer said.

"If my classes aren't full, my teachers don't have jobs," Daenzer said.

• The Northeast Oakland Technical Center in Pontiac, which serves the Aromath district, dropped several classes in previous years, but has the distinction this year of being fully enrolled, said James Bowie, principal.

In fact, this year enrollment is 598, an increase of 85 students from the previous year, Bowie said.

We just have to work harder at it than we did several years ago.

. . .but predicting pendulum will swing

Society focuses on students going into a college preparatory program in high school and not a vocational program. But the pendulum will soon swing back toward vocational education, according to one Oakland County vocational center principal.

We have to teach our kids that you can come to the center and still go on to a big university, Royal Oak Center principal John Daenzer said. "The technical careers are where the action is."

His counterpart at the Walled Lake Center, John Xenos said the centers are working in partnership

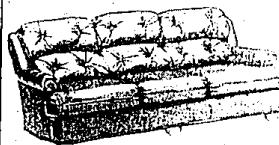
with businesses to provide additional training for their employees.

We found that was a gap that just wasn't being served by any other institution," Xenos said.

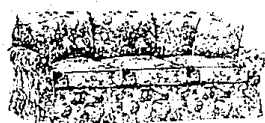
In the future, the Walled Lake center hopes to provide a program for teen mothers. To receive training and have a day care center for their children, Xenos said.

Five years from now, vocational education will be in its heyday, Daenzer said. "We're going to come off of our ivory tower and recognize all types of education."

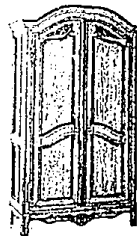
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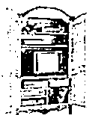


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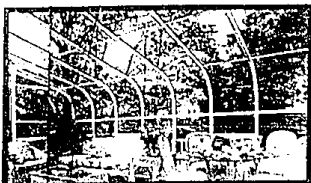
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