

A special bonjour

Kindergartners get language lesson

WALKING DOWN the hall at Alameda, principal Gayle Zimmerer gets a special kind of greeting these days.

"I don't get 'Hello,' I get 'Bonjour,' Mrs. Zimmerer," she said following a visit by 12 members of the Mercy High School French Honor Society, who brought their language into kindergarten classrooms recently.

"I don't know who enjoyed it more. We've never had an opportunity like this," she added. "Truly, they brought us a taste of France."

The Mercy students took about four months to plan their lesson for the younger students. The lesson included colors, numbers, animals and the alphabet. Clothing was used as a prop to teach the children French names for individual pieces and to describe colors.



Mercy student Beth Morelli talks to the children in French and English.

Some 134 kindergartners — three classes in the morning and three in the afternoon — were all part of the mini-language session. Each student wore a nametag with the words "Je m'appelle," meaning "My name is."

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At the end of the lesson, the high school students performed "Little Rouge Riding Hood," tying in all aspects of the learning. Each child took home a certificate commemorating their special day of learning.

"It just confirms, you can be in language at an early level," said Mercy French teacher Joyce Smetanka. "They were able to give it back to us. For my kids, that was their reward."

Smetanka said they were also able to teach the younger students a bit about French culture.



Mercy students taught kindergartners the French names for pieces of clothing and different colors by handing out pants, shirts and

socks from a packed suitcase. Here, Alameda student Nicole Foglia gets a pair of pants from Becky Nowrot.



photos by SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Alameda students Andrew Seigh and Ian Robertson (right) hold up a "high five" as the Mer-

cy students teach the kindergartners how to count to eight in French.

Parents plan to take on school financing problems

Related editorial, 16A

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Parents from Farmington and other southeast Michigan school districts hope to have a task force in place soon to address school financing problems statewide.

Members of the Coalition of Michigan Parents met this month to discuss their role, and to form a core group of parents, private industry, school districts, legislators, school unions and school board groups that can cut through the political rhetoric and come up with an answer.

Monthly meetings are planned, with the next one scheduled for May 16 in Lansing.

"WHAT WE'RE trying to do is broaden our base," Jan Bennett said.

Bennett is one of three Farmington Hills parents and COMP members who went to Lansing earlier this year to give legislators copies of school finance petitions and highlight the Farmington district's financial plight.

"We'd like to have something by the time this freeze kicks in."

Bennett referred to recent state action freezing property tax assessments beginning in 1992.

THE TASK force would educate people throughout Michigan about school finance and, it is hoped, pick an option that's workable, Bennett said.

The group would also continue to work against the state's recapture of money, she said.

Parents are frustrated and concerned about what they see as a lack of understanding in Lansing and 11th

hour legislation that has damaged out-of-formula districts without helping in-formula ones.

"The joke is, the Legislature has no idea what they're doing in the long term," she said.

State lawmakers yanked \$72 million from a handful of out-of-formula districts last summer, including \$5.6 million from the Farmington district, statistics from the State Senate Fiscal Agency said.

School officials have put that figure closer to \$5.8 million, and expect another \$6.8 million in state recapture in the 1991-92 year.

JUST LAST week, legislators voted to approve a compromise measure to freeze property tax assessments beginning in 1992 and, in a November 1992 ballot referendum, allow voters to decide on a constitutional amendment for capping assessment increases.

The legislation gave local governments a one-year reprieve on dealing with budgets and other issues. Local officials had feared for the worst: an immediate freeze and devastation to already prepared fiscal budgets.

Farmington could face \$24.6 million in cuts when the freeze hits, Superintendent Michael Flanagan has predicted.

THE GROUP hopes to work on its plan of action over the summer and have the task force in place and working by this fall, Bennett said.

Although COMP has not yet determined the size of the task force, Bennett said she would prefer that it be a workable size of about 15-20 people representing various groups.

Any number of parents could get involved as well, she said.

"Until this question of financing is resolved, there is a lot to do," she said.

Delay in tax freeze cheered, but local officials remain wary

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Intendents who spent two days in Lansing lobbying against an immediate freeze.

FARMINGTON'S CITY manager was relieved the effect of the freeze would not be immediate, as originally thought, because groundwork on 1991-92 fiscal year budgets is already completed.

"There wasn't any doubt in my mind they were going to do something," said Robert Deadman. "I guess I'm a little more concerned about the ultimate solution. Are they willing to step up to the problems?"

Although there has been little public comment among Farmington Hills City Council members about the freeze, Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnoni recently said at a school board meeting that the state action "would

hurt Farmington Hills too" with cuts to state revenue sharing.

"It's almost a hoax," he added. "They're trying to give the impression of some kind of tax relief without doing much of it."

One positive thing, he said, is that state action "has finally energized the superintendents and... the city managers of this state to become political."

On April 18 legislators passed a bipartisan compromise bill, with the support of Gov. John Engler, to freeze property tax assessments next year at this year's level. It would put on the 1992 ballot a proposal to limit assessment increases to inflation or five percent, whichever is less, until a property is sold.

WHEN A HOME is sold, it would be assessed at 50 percent of the cash value, as it is now. Then, assess-

ments would be limited again.

Overall, property tax revenues would increase in areas with new construction, but older, developed cities with declining populations, such as Farmington, would be hard hit.

Statewide, out-of-formula school districts would lose \$163 million while counties, cities, villages and townships would lose about \$128 million, according to the State Senate Fiscal Agency.

Legislators representing the Farmington area — Sen. Jack Faxen, a Farmington Hills Democrat, and state Rep. Jan Dolan, a Farmington Hills Republican — both voted to approve the assessment freeze and to send the proposed constitutional amendment to voters in 1992.

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