



What's cooking?: Heather Samson and her classmate Kristi Cline (left) make chili at the Farmington Alternative Academy.

SHARON LEHMEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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everyone gets along well. There are no cliques, she said, and everybody is open-minded.

Some policies at the school reinforce the goal. For example a nickel is paid for each swear word used in school, which last year went to help pay for the school's prom, Samson said.

There are some school activities which might be considered traditional like the prom, graduation, or student council, to which all students belong.

### Samson's classes

Samson works on the school paper, called the "Tiger's Tail" and journalism is her favorite class, but she also takes government, algebra, grammar,

personal finance, foods and nutrition and physical science.

Her writing entails more than that learned in journalism class. Samson has pen pals around the world and also carries with her a love of animals which developed when she was just a young girl.

She attended Forest Elementary School and Warner Middle School, but said she did not have a problem with school until high school. Although she loves the academy, she still has a few good friends back at North who she sees regularly.

She has an older sister and lives with her parents in Farmington Hills.

Next term, Samson will continue to attend the

academy but also take classes at Oakland Community College.

"I guess I can say I'm really glad I came here," she added. "You're all friends here, both teachers and students."

Success for the alternative program is counted in different ways, Klenczar said.

Last year nine students received their high school diplomas after attending the academy in its first year. Several older students went on to attend traditional adult education programs at night so they could work during the day. A few others returned to their home high schools after attending the acad-

my, something Klenczar counts as a success.

"Whatever time frame they need, we're able to provide it," she added.

There are seven teachers in the alternative academy program and Klenczar said all of them have a special approach to teaching. "I look for a teacher who has a positive attitude about students — a teacher who is very flexible and very caring."

Most referrals to the program are done through word of mouth by students, but referrals also come from school counselors and principals and from parent calls the district to inquire about the program.

### Candidate speaks:

Walter Briggs, candidate for Congress in the 11th District, has the attention of students at the Farmington Alternative Academy.



STAFF PHOTO BY JOHN STORMZAND

## Alternative Academy blends basics with innovative classes

BY CASEY HANS  
STAFF WRITER



Although students at the Farmington Alternative Academy take traditional classes like history or math, they also enjoy elective courses like foods, computers

and personal finance. And blocks of time on Wednesday afternoons are set aside for field trips, like a recent one to the Fermi II plant, and to hear speakers including a recent visit from Walter Briggs, the Democratic candidate for the new 11th district seat to the U.S. Congress.

Briggs' political visit followed study of the upcoming election, and student questions were spirited. They asked about his experience in government, education, age limits and parental consent on abortion and whether Briggs had any political mentors.

Student Chuck Firmant, a 19-year-old registered voter, said he would likely vote for Briggs after



Interested student: Claudia Fobbs, 17, has a question for the candidate.

hearing his comments, but said he thought Briggs sidestepped some of the questions students asked like the one on whether there should be age limits for abortion. Candidates today need to "get out there and see what's going on," he added.

Classmate Rano O'Conner said she felt today's politicians should "stop spending so much money on weapons and be concerned

about the people, the jobs and education."

Briggs said he supported alternative programs such as the one he visited in Farmington, and encouraged young people to get involved with politics and government. "The only way to change things is to get involved," he added. "Be part of it."

In regular classes at the academy, students are encouraged to offer opinions which are more often heard with small class sizes of 12-15 students. Teacher Barbara Hardy said she finds the class sizes at the academy "a lot better for the kids. You can give them a lot of individualized attention," she added.

Community education director Terry Klenczar said she sees the Alternative Academy program continuing, but not growing much bigger than the 35-40 students who are enrolled at any given time. The smaller size allows more students to get involved.

"The important thing is the self esteem and that they are able to take leadership roles," she said. "It means they're feeling good about themselves."

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## Symphony to perform at Farmington High

The symphony orchestra of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, will perform at Farmington High School at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 27. The concert is sponsored by the Farmington High Music Department and St. John Lutheran Church.

The orchestra, conducted by Douglas Diamond, features senior violinist Kari Urevig. The daughter of Laurence and Ruth Ann Urevig was

concert mistress of the Farmington High School orchestra during her senior year there. She played violin four years at Farmington.

The 70-member Decorah Orchestra, which began in 1956, tours sections of the United States each year. Last January, conductor Diamond took the group to Austria, Germany and Hungary for a performance tour and study residency.