

Worth a try

Special meetings could work

The Farmington Board of Education is carrying an "A" in its time management class... although some stiff examinations are ahead.

The board decided recently to restructure its meeting format so that the second of its two meetings a month can be devoted to a single subject in a town hall-type setting. Regular business will be conducted at the first meeting.

The new format begins at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 21, when state Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, comes to board headquarters to discuss school finance.

Reason for the change? Well, Farmington school officials had a very busy summer, issue-wise. The back-to-basics controversy raged for awhile, and then there was that little tiff with a local family over the removal of barriers from a trail.

Of course, the big issue was provided by the state Legislature, which did away with local property taxes to finance public education.

It seemed to be one thing after another, and things were backing up for the Gang on Shilawasse Hill. The board needed to organize its time and make better use of its resources, if it expected to cope.

That's what it did, we feel, with the restructured meeting format.

The plan calls for more use of the board's three-member committees, which could visit sites where issues would be discussed with the community. Committee members would then report to the board during the regular meetings.

Some board members believe the changes will allow for more discussion and better understanding of educational issues like finance.

■ It seemed to be one thing after another, and things were backing up for the Gang on Shilawasse Hill.

Such open-ended meetings would make the officialdom of education more accessible to the community.

A similar format (a regular meeting followed by town hall-type meeting) was attempted several years ago under former Superintendent Graham Lewis.

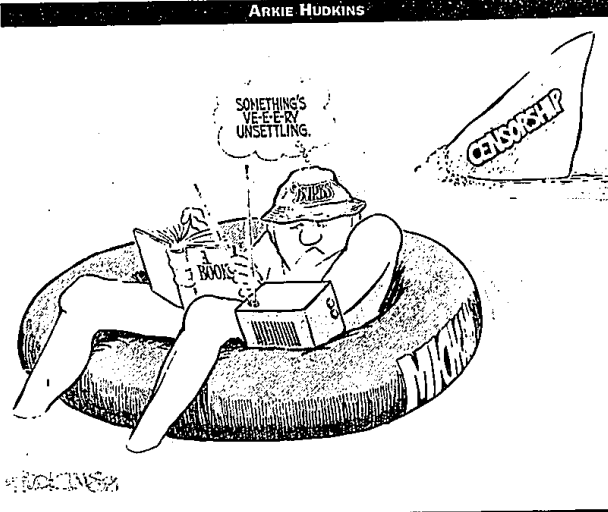
"I think the results were completely abysmal," said trustee Jack Inch, who isn't sold on the idea now. He's concerned there wouldn't be enough time to complete regular business.

Inch's point is well-taken. The board usually copes with a heavy agenda. However, after watching school officials swamped with issues over the last year or so, it's clear that more time is needed to look at them.

Perhaps the board could hold three public meetings a month (Do we hear at least seven loud groans at that proposal?) as many city councils do. That should provide enough time for normal business as well as the informal discussion of issues at the town hall session.

Anyway, we approve of the board's decision to at least try the new format. The board and other school officials need to hear what the public has to say before it makes a decision.

It's just an experiment. Give it a few months. If it isn't working, then scrap it. It is worth trying, though.



LETTERS

They enjoyed coverage

We want to thank you for the feature that you did Sept. 9 on Oxford Estates. We were quite impressed with the extended coverage and pictures that appeared in the Observer.

We would also like to tell photographer Sharon LeMieux that we enjoyed the pictures that she took at the downtown Farmington Farmers' Market that were featured in the Sept. 6 Observer.

Thanks again for your support.

Joann Tolstedt, Marilyn Rearick, Farmington Hills

participated in a protest but are sick of broken promises from our politicians.

Transportation will be arranged by "Speak Out America" for those interested in making the trip to Washington, D.C.

The Michigan rally will be held at Freedom Hill Park in Sterling Heights on the same day, Oct. 16.

For those interested in more information about "Speak Out America," please call 1-800-Be Angry. For information on transportation to Washington, call 355-9799 (Southfield) or 887-4919 (Highland).

Roy Jones, Southfield

Censors subvert education

The bad news: Censors are lurking out there, keeping watch on our school libraries and classrooms. Yes, even in the enlightened '90s, these self-appointed defenders of morality are at work.

The good news: Most of the censors' attempts to remove books and other materials from Michigan school libraries have been unsuccessful.

Those were the low and high points of a report issued recently on the subject of censorship by People for the American Way, a Washington, D.C.-based rights group.

A dozen Michigan schools and libraries — including three in Birmingham — were targeted for censorship during the 1992-93 school year, said the report, "Attacks on Freedom to Learn."

According to the report, the Birmingham examples of censorship attempts were:

■ A parent asking that "The Perfect Family" by Nancy Carlson be removed from an elementary school library because the parent said it showed a bias against large families. The book was retained, but school officials agreed to discuss the objections raised by the parents.

■ A videotape — "What If I'm Gay," part of a health course for high school students — incurring the wrath of several groups, including the Michigan Family Forum and the anti-homosexual group Wake-Up America. After reviewing the material, the school board voted, 5-1, to keep the video.

■ A self-esteem program for elementary schoolers coming under fire from parents, who called it nonacademic. The matter is still under review, as far as we know.

Censors have been busy across the state, de-

manding that the educational scene be cleared of all that confused or angered them. Many would-be censors cited sexual content, objectionable language or religious concerns with books, plays, videos, etc.

But not all censors approach their work from a right-wing, fundamentalist point of view. Some, coming from the opposite social direction, are intent on making their world politically correct.

In Michigan, during the last school year, censors tried to yank "Little House on the Prairie" because of the way it depicts American Indians, "Tom Sawyer" for "terms that belittle people of color" and "Sleeping Beauty" because it's frightening.

As ridiculous as the above examples may seem, they point up the fact that censorship is still with us. The folks who run our schools and governments must be reminded every now and again that censorship will not be tolerated.

You could pour on the righteous indignation about the censors' tactics, you could say that there's definitely something wrong with their attitude, that it reminds you of Nazi Germany — and you'd be right.

But the worst part of censorship in schools is that it subverts part of the educational process. Most of us know that there's more to an education than textbooks, lectures, examinations and grades. An education also is supposed to broaden the horizons of the students by exposing them to a few new ideas.

Students need to learn that there's more to life than their little corner of America, which is, so often, filled with people who think, look and act just like them.

She says thanks

This letter is long overdue. I've been wanting to write to you.

1. You have a wonderful representative and salesman in Jeffrey Miller, our Farmington Observer Newspaper carrier. Rain or shine, he is here.

2. Your cable TV weekly is the best. The channels are all correctly numbered, even for cable.

Eleanora Weber, Farmington

He has suggestions

I am extremely pleased that State Rep. Jan Dolan voted yes for the property tax cut and for the courage that Gov. John Engler showed for property tax reform by signing into law Senate Bill 1, which eliminates the property tax as a way to finance schools.

I know that there will have to be replacement revenue needed, and also to have better schools for the children of Michigan.

My suggestions:

- Go to the voters again for sales tax. Now that we have a property tax cut people will vote for the sales tax.
- Send 100 percent of lottery funds to schools.
- Tax cigarettes and alcohol even more.
- Tax pop and soft drinks.
- No property tax in any form should be used.
- No income tax should be used.
- Health care insurance for school employees should be bid out.
- Teachers should pay their own retirement benefits.
- Eliminate the 562 school districts and their administrative costs forming one statewide district. The one central district would negotiate with each union and enforce no strike clause.
- The 180 days of school per year in Michigan is far too short. This was OK in the 19th Century and compete in world technology. We need to do what the Japanese are doing: 240 days of school per year, eight hours per day. Our kids must compete and learn more science, math, English and foreign languages.

The Michigan Legislature needs to change the school year from 180 days per year to 240 days per year, eight hours per day.

Leonard Weems, Farmington Hills

He's speaking out

I am an average American taxpayer who is frustrated with the elected officials in Washington, D.C.

After viewing the budget battle and watching the government in action regarding our taxes, I decided to try to do something to let them know how I feel.

I heard about an organization called "Speak Out America" from a friend. "Speak Out America" was started by a caller to a radio talk show who was contacted by other callers, and has since snowballed into a nationwide effort to stage a huge protest in our nation's capital and around the country.

Upon reviewing the material from "Speak Out America," I decided to join and be a part of their march on Washington on Oct. 16. This is Taxpayer Action Day.

In addition to the march on Washington, there will be about 200 local marches across the country in affiliation with "Citizen's Against Government Waste."

We will be protesting the way government spends our tax money. The motto of "Speak Out America" is "cut taxes, cut spending, cut government and cut waste."

We hope to unite all the excellent existing organizations like "Citizens Against Government Waste," "American for Tax Reform" and "United We Stand." At the same time we hope to attract people like myself who have never before

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION: Will there be lasting peace in the Middle East?

We asked this question at the Farmington branch of the Community Library.



"Day by day you watch the news... and hope is there."
 Susan Semposki
 Farmington



"I'm pretty positive about things in the Middle East now. I think there will be peace."
 Fran Allen
 Farmington Hills



"It looks kind of shaky. I always get a non-trusting feeling from events in the Middle East."
 James Davis
 Detroit



"I doubt it... 5,000 years of history say no. Hope I'm wrong."
 John Cunniff
 Farmington

The Farmington Observer

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