

Sibling silliness Highmeadow policy is wrong

When it comes to Highmeadow Common Campus, Farmington-area parents quite literally can't get enough of a good thing. We think school policy should be changed so they can.

It's a touchy subject, we know, but this ridiculous "sibling priority" policy at Highmeadow has to go — now, before attorneys' briefcases start clicking open in some courtroom.

Highmeadow, the special school that offers alternative elementary education for students in grades 1-5, has become a huge success since its inception nine years ago.

How successful? Well, so hot a ticket is Highmeadow that an annual lottery must be held to see who'll get in and who'll have to settle for regular old elementary school.

It's the luck of the draw, and it seems fair. But, wait! Get one kid in and his/her siblings are automatically in as well. That's the sibling priority policy that has left only five openings for 148 applicants in the March 13 lottery.

This spring, as in most springs over the past several years, people complained — unsuccessfully — to school officials about the sibling policy.

Opponents have called the policy elitist and claimed it creates a private school paid for by public tax dollars. One parent, Sam Tyler, wants the names of parents who took part in the lottery for use in a possible class action suit.

Of course, supporters of the sibling policy — also a vociferous bunch — make their points, too, and the board of education has always

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sided with them. Families should be kept together, they say, not spread over the district. This is especially important in an era where so often both parents work, they add.

Well, that's wrong thinking and school officials are wrong for supporting it. Perhaps the sibling policy was fine when Highmeadow wasn't such a big deal and there were plenty of spots. But now, with so many waiting in, it's just not right to shut them out year after year.

What officials need to do is capitalize on Highmeadow's success by providing more of them. The ultimate goal should be to have public schools so good that every school is a Highmeadow. What an idea: a district where the best is like the worst. The concept could be called "equity and excellence."

Sound familiar? Anyway, the Farmington Public Schools has a good thing in Highmeadow. The school, selected for National Exemplary status in 1994, continually leads the district in performance on the standardized tests.

School officials should put themselves on the back and take themselves out to lunch. But they should not stop doing what seems to work, while pleasing their customers so.

Kevorkian trial waste of effort

Enough already! We've had it with the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office wasting time and money in a relentless bid to prosecute Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the man who helps people commit suicide.

The issue here is not the morality of assisted suicide, but rather the wasted resources on two Oakland County trials charging Kevorkian with assisted suicide. The latest trial, scheduled to start this week in the 1991 deaths of Marjorie Wanz and Sherry Miller, comes on the heels of the 67-year-old West Bloomfield resident's acquittal on similar charges.

The first Oakland trial — set in a circus atmosphere — stemmed from criminal charges from a now-expired state law. The latest charges are grounded in common law — based on court decisions, customs and usages rather than codified written laws. Holding trial after trial makes absolutely no sense until state lawmakers enact legislation governing, or the U.S. Supreme Court rules on, the white-hot issue of assisted suicide.

In case anybody missed it, a jury last month acquitted Kevorkian of aiding a suicide in the 1993 deaths of Dr. Ali Khalili and Merian Frederick. That trial was based on a state law passed in February 1993 and allowed to expire in November 1994. It made it illegal for anyone to assist another in committing suicide. Since the law was in force when Khalili and Frederick died, it could be argued the prosecutor had no choice but to charge Kevorkian. Then again, a lapsed law is a lapsed law.

That trial actually had been preceded by a 1994 trial in Wayne County where Kevorkian was acquitted in Thomas Hyde's death under the same lapsed law.

Now another trial, a kind of third one-act drama, is in the offing. This one is based on common law, a law the Michigan Supreme Court said could be applied to assisted suicide.

In invoking common law, Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson seems to charge that helping someone take their life is unacceptable to society.

Right or wrong, society may be changing its mind on that. The acquittals — and the behind-the-scenes admissions by many doctors that they help patients die by administering large doses of morphine, and even the growth of living wills and hospice care — point to changes in how society views our lengthening life spans.

It is not out on us that this latest attempt to convict Kevorkian for helping people commit suicide began with jury selection on April Fool's Day. He was there, dressed in Colonial-era garb, to call attention to the law under which he is being tried.

In the end, it's a good bet the jury will utter those two words every defense attorney lives for: "Not guilty."

There's a perception that Richard Thompson, the county's chief prosecutor, is attempting to make political capital of Kevorkian and assisted suicide in a kind of encore presentation that will follow the trial. The decent residents of Oakland County will reward him with votes if he stops this man who, after all, connives with the killing of human beings, goes the thinking.

But perception is not always reality. Despite his quirks and eccentricities, Kevorkian, a retired pathologist, has done more than anyone to change how people feel, or at least think about, this sensitive issue of assisted suicide. Witness the popular opinion polls.

Assisted suicide is something Americans seem to be willing to confront. The issue needs more scrutiny; make no mistake about that. But it demands action in the form of legislated guidelines that help prevent abuse against people who are frail, infirm, elderly or not lucid — and, at the same time, give physicians an unadulterated picture of the role they play.

west of Beechview Elementary School. Farmington Hills firefighters were called to douse the blaze.

■ 1 YEAR AGO — APRIL 4, 1995 (OBSERVER) Farmington police were considering extraditing a former newspaper publisher, Derek Gendron, from Florida. He was wanted here on three felony warrants. Farmington Hills police suspected that alcohol was a factor in a fatal auto crash on Northwestern Highway. A West Bloomfield resident died after a smash-up with another auto. A fallen tree on Beechwood in Farmington pulled down wires, causing 900 Detroit Edison customers to lose power for about two hours.

This week in history as reported in the pages of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise:

■ 40 YEARS AGO — APRIL 5, 1956 (ENTERPRISE) Ernest Blanchard, Farmington Township supervisor, was seriously ill in Pontiac's St. Joseph Hospital following a stroke. The Rev. Walter Kellison was installed as minister of the Farmington Universalist Church. Short item: "The energy of the free individual is the most dynamic force in human affairs."

■ 10 YEARS AGO — APRIL 3, 1986 (OBSERVER) Two children playing with a lighter were responsible for starting a field fire

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

When it comes to computers, do you know more than your children?



"I think I know more right now. My kids are only 2 and 4. Next year they'll know more."
Jessica Mykolaitis
Livonia



"I know a lot about computers. I use them at work. But my daughter knows more about graphics."
Ann Braid
Farmington Hills



"I have a 16-year-old. Whatever I'm learning about computers I'm getting from him."
Elizabeth Marinaz
Farmington Hills



"I know more at this point. My son is only 3."
Joanne King
Farmington

We asked this question at the Downtown Branch of the Farmington Community Library.

LETTERS

She liked column

I have been reading the Farmington Observer for almost as many years as I have lived in the Farmington area. In the past 24 years, I have never been so impressed by a column as I have been with the one written by Chief Larry Jones. It was in the March 25 Observer.

My family and I are so proud to see that there are many families that still have good values, manners, respect, and above all, religion.

James is raising his children the same way his parents raised him. My husband and I have raised our children the same way our parents raised us, with love, kindness, respect and faith. It never hurts to share a smile, say a prayer, give thanks, or "open a car door."

I believe people would be much happier, and it would make for a better world, if they did.

Thank you for printing this article, and to Mr. James, my family and I applaud you.
Sylvia J. Akouri, Farmington Hills

Big day coming

Earth Day is a big thing at St. Fabian School this year. Why? I'll tell you why. First of all we're having a nature lady come in with some dead, stuffed animals and talk to us about our forests.

Then, a walk in a rain forest. Well, not a real one, but a drawn one by we sixth graders. Our work is fantastic. After all that, the students will go to their classrooms and eat treats that are provided by room moms, moms that help each classroom when they need help.

If you come, we will make a banner for you. The celebration is on April 19, Earth Day, at St. Fabian School.

Brian Scriven, Farmington Hills

How interesting!

Take your mind off your problems, forget your daily cares and think about this instead:

1. The solar system in which you live is hurtling through space toward the constellation of Hercules at about 45,000 miles per hour.
2. The length of Earth's orbit around the sun is about 583.4 million miles and it travels along its orbit at about 66,000 miles per hour.
3. The Earth rotates on its axis, at the equator, at about 1,000 miles per hour.
4. The circumference of the Earth at the equator is 24,902.4 miles.
5. Earth's total surface area is 196.95 million square miles and its volume is 295.89 billion cubic miles.
6. The Earth's total mass (weight) is about

6.595 billion, billion tons.

7. The average depth of Earth's oceans is 12,447 feet.

8. The average mass of Earth's oceans is about 1.490 billion, billion tons.

9. The age of the Earth is estimated to be between 3.5 and 5.5 billion years.

While none of this information is new (I got it from a 1973 edition encyclopedia), it is still probably the most interesting information you will read in any newspaper this week.

Kenneth Kemp, Farmington Hills

Thanks, council

Farmington Hills residents can be proud of their city council for the action taken March 25 in denying a permit to West Bay Exploration to drill for oil in Farmington Hills.

Over a period of years, the council studied oil drilling. Then they set up rules to be followed in any oil or gas drilling in the city. West Bay's plan did not meet the criteria. West Bay wanted to drill anyway.

What other rules would they disregard? The city council unanimously voted no.

Rules adopted to protect our city have to be followed. Oil drilling in the city will be ugly, noisy, dangerous and unpleasant.

Thank you, city council, for keeping Farmington Hills a good place to live.

Ruth Mochlman, Farmington Hills

On assault guns

Despite the overwhelming approval by the American people who supported the ban on these killer assault guns, our brilliant elected representatives voted in favor of getting the guns back on the streets.

This is payback time to the NRA. Come election time in November, who in their right mind will vote to re-elect those who voted to put those assault guns back on the streets?

Milton Rose, Farmington Hills

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, 33411 Grand River, Farmington 48335. Or, they can be faxed to: 810-477-9722.

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— Philip Power