

Hearing airs views of public vs. private schools

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Public schools are great. Not perfect, but not deserving such blistering criticism, and certainly better than private and parochial schools and most foreign schools.

Government and industrialists are plotting to make American kids dumb by teaching whole-language instead of phonics. The plot follows Nikolai Lenin's Soviet plan that children are human resources for industry rather than reservoirs for memorizing knowledge.

So went a "broad conversation about the future of public education," as sent to the State Board of Education by way of Mike Williamson, an assistant superintendent of public instruction. Williamson, Northville Township resident and former Wyandotte superintendent, listened Monday evening to two and one-half hours of testimony in the Oakland Intermediate district auditorium in Waterford.

"I'm disappointed no State Board of Education members are here," said Carolyn Das, a Farmington mother defending special education. Lynette Slason of Royal Oak and Barbara DeMarco of West Bloomfield agreed. Neither president Clark Durant or any of the other six State Board members (there's one vacancy) attended the Oakland hearing, although some had attended others.

Most are happy

If the 29 speakers weren't exactly a cross-section of opinion, a school official said scientific polling data indicate a high degree of happiness.

Rick Simonson, assistant superintendent of Oakland Schools and its legislative agent, said 15 percent give public schools an A, 94 percent an A, B or C, and "parents are more positive than the average."

Parents of students in private and parochial schools are more positive yet because of the technology and facilities available in

public schools," Simonson said. As for trends, 24 percent say their public schools are getting better and 10 percent worse.

Added Royal Oak Superintendent Fred Each: "The quality of instruction is far superior to what I provided when I started in this 37 years ago... and I'm proud to say it." But he added there never has been as much criticism.

Criticizing the lack of phonics (the use of sound in teaching reading and spelling) and the "school-to-work" program were Patricia Raelzer of Troy, Deborah DeBacko of Troy, Laura Erpelind of Lapeer, Mary Ann Lerner of Lapeer, Betty Laper of Lapeer, Katy Martin of Clawson, Jennifer Kirby of Oxford, Sue Stickel of Troy, Charlene Femminio of Troy and Barbara Skurniewicz of Bloomfield Hills.

Some also got in blows at witchcraft, pagan altars, socialism, social programs and John Dewey.

Charters hit twice

Both factions had criticism of Gov. John Engler's "charter schools," a system of giving many private and specialized schools state money.

"Charter schools are a joke!" said Femminio of Troy, citing Ojibwa and African-American curricula.

"Charter schools are taking money from public schools without playing by the rules," said "wrong," said Ken Plante, a Holly teacher, product of private schools and "very happy member of the MEA."

"Kids go to charter schools and then play sports in public schools. That's wrong. Stacks of employees are being fired by charter schools at the end of the year so they don't have to pay them more. That's wrong," said Plante.

Plante also hit the new "school of choice" bill, which failed to provide transportation between districts, and the homogeneity and lack of multiculturalism in private schools.

Kay Cornell, a member of the Oakland County Curriculum Council, criticized Engler's veto of professional development funds for improving teaching. "I'm dismayed. Teachers are learners as much as their students are. Without it, staff development will cease," Cornell said.

Parents are key

Julie O'Reilly of Bloomfield Hills criticized the adult ed cuts because of their impact on young mothers. "We're missing an opportunity to teach future families," the Southfield teacher said. Young mothers learn to read by reading to their small children — and even writing stories for them.

"If people have complaints, they should get involved in PTAs and school committees," said Kathy Swisher of Rochester Hills. Here was a common theme: Kids learn better when parents get involved in their

schooling.

"It's the parents' responsibility to work with schools," said Cynthia von Deyer, Bloomfield Hills mother of "successful readers."

"A lot of success is due to parent involvement," said Royal Oak school board member Richard Granke.

Flint school board member Rachel Haviland said, "Michigan children are the fittest and most out-of-shape kids in the U.S. because of lack of physical education requirements."

Betsy Watson, Farmington mother of a severely multiply-impaired son, praised Cloverdale School's program. "We're concerned with training him to sit and hold a spoon," she said, adding praise for the PTA. "Public education is alive and well at my house," said Orchard Lake mother Karen Jaggard. "I applaud the state of Michigan for leading the nation in special education."

Learn about career as medical assistant

Oakland Community College's Highland Lakes Campus will host an information night at 8 p.m. Tuesday, July 23 in

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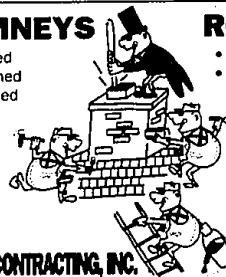
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