

State board tangled up over 'character education'

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

After a long gestation, the State Board of Education is due to give birth today to a resolution advising public schools to do "character education."

The question is: Will it embody values such as "respect, responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, justice, fairness, civic virtue and citizenship," as proposed by Superintendent of Public Instruction Art Ellis?

Or will it be laced with references to God, Bible lessons and parents, as advocated by board president Clark Durant, R-Grosse Pointe?

The eight-member State Board has been tangled on the issue since July. It didn't take up the matter in August and September.

The October meeting is scheduled to start at 9:30 a.m. in the fourth floor of the John A. Hannah Building, 603 W. Allegan about two blocks west of the State Capitol in Lansing. Public comment is scheduled for 1 p.m.

There are signs many consider it a tempest in a teapot. Tim Kelly, Gov. John Engler's representative to the board, already has said the body has spent too much time on it.

Louis Legg III, R-Battle Creek, Gov. Engler's latest appointee to fill a board vacancy, has hinted he is less than ecstatic over the dragged-out argument.

In a letter to all board members, the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit called it "unnecessary for the State Board of Education to devote so much energy on this issue. Values always have been, and continue to be, taught by capable, caring educators throughout our public school system."

The letter, signed by president Allen Zimmol, said Durant "has repeatedly used his position as president... to attempt to insert religion into the public schools."

Durant apparently had a hand in drafting the

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first resolution, which emphasizes "fundamental rights of parents" and places parents and religious leaders in prominent spots to be on local school district drafting committees.

And Durant touched a raw nerve among many when he said, in an out-of-the-room interview with a broadcaster, that Bible stories could be used to teach character.

Board member Dorothy Beardmore, R-Rochester, offered a counter-proposal. It says American values "transcend religious beliefs." She cited the values of "respect, responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, justice and fairness, and civic virtue and citizenship."

The Beardmore draft places responsibility on "public schools to provide character education," without mentioning what interest groups should be on the local district's committee. And it underscores "constitutional separation of church and state," to which Marilyn Lundy, R-Grosse Pointe and a Durant supporter, strongly objects.

A Texas company sells a curriculum in building character, but the State Board, as a matter of policy, refuses to endorse any one curriculum or textbook.

Many of Michigan's 690 public school districts long have tried to teach values of character, though not necessarily in a systematic way and not necessarily the same values.

Microsoft exec addresses OCC crowd

Oakland Community College continues its 1996 Fall Distinguished Speaker Series Wednesday, Nov. 6, with Anthony Ryner, regional manager for Microsoft. He will speak on "Changes in the Workplace" at 9:30 a.m. in Smith Theater at the Orchard Ridge Campus. The free event is open to the public.

Throughout his 14-year career in the PC industry, Ryner has

held key positions at companies leading in the evolution of technology. He joined Microsoft in 1989 to establish the Great Lakes Region and subsequently developed it into one of the company's largest territories. During his tenure, the territory has been the recipient of several performance awards. Mr. Ryner is recognized as one of Microsoft's top business contributors.

A graduate of Walsh College, Ryner is a member of the Walsh College President's Advisory Council.

OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus is located at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, just south of I-696 in Farmington Hills. For more information about the Distinguished Speaker Series call (810) 471-7744.

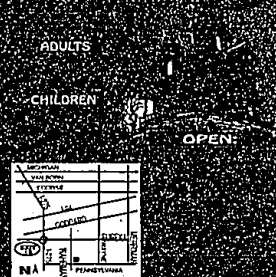
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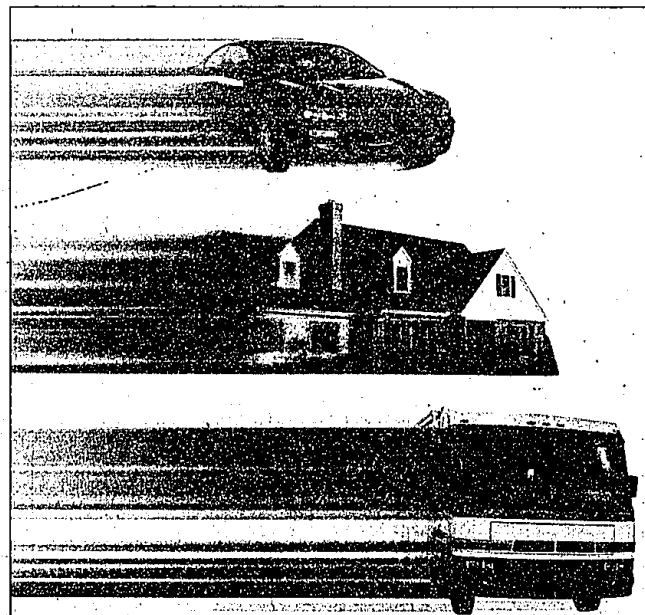
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