

Lotto fever

Sibling policy change a good start

Easy solutions aren't easy to come by when you're setting policy for enrolling students in a popular school.

The Farmington school board, however, is making a logical, equitable move by opening up its popular school of choice, Highmeadow Common Campus, to a real lottery system. But it should be just a first step.

The difference between the old lottery system and the new lottery system gets down to a question of probability: A lottery that holds virtually no chance of winning isn't really worth playing.

Under the old system, the names of students whose parents wanted them to attend Highmeadow would be put into a lottery. Once a student's name was picked, his or her brothers and sisters were also welcomed into the school. This so-called "sibling policy" was set up so as not to disrupt entire families where some won admission to Highmeadow and some didn't.

Unfortunately, this policy ended up severely diminishing the chance for new enrollees to get into this desirable school. Last year, only five of a possible 50 openings at the school were open to lottery picks. The remainder of those first grade

spots were filled by siblings of current students.

Yes, this sibling policy makes sense when balanced against the desire to keep families together at one school. But the key is that the parents who choose this school do so voluntarily. They could just as easily choose their neighborhood school and, if they're concerned about the convenience and dividing their families between two schools and their schedules, it might be a better idea. This solution, approved by the board Tuesday, will "grandfather" in all current Highmeadow parents to allow them to stay.

Opening up Highmeadow to more students from a wider number of families will help the district reach one of its goals of promoting "quality and equity throughout the school community." It may also have the unintended effect of making Highmeadow more attractive to parents with a single child. But after half a dozen years of catering to larger families, it's time.

Most importantly, this controversy spotlights the high demand by parents for the type of school success that Highmeadow has achieved. The district must find a way to incorporate that formula for success in the district's other schools or in another choice school.

It's cheesy, but important stuff

Cheesy! That's a word Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Henry William Sned said Tuesday that some people might use to describe all this diversity, multicultural and multiracial stuff that was part of the Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council's Rainbow Recognition Awards breakfast.

In one sense, they'd be right to complain that it's all a lot of preachy, rah-rahism about living together in a Utopian society where everybody should get along and stereotyping is a thing of the past. And it is preaching to the converted.

But that is the point of this event. We all hear plenty of negative viewpoints about the state of

society, race relations, cultural diversity, holiday policies and all that from media, family or friends. We all know the stereotyping and the hatred still goes on.

Taking the time to recognize the positives that other cultures and races bring to our melting pot society is really the message beyond the quiches and speeches. And yes, you can support those goals quietly, behind the scenes. But the strength of numbers of nearly 30 award winners and the 200-plus attendees reinforces the value that this community puts on understanding each other better.

Justice replaces mean spirit

Words like "mean spirited" and "vindictive" are used a lot in politics, sometimes loosely. They were used especially often to describe Richard Thompson, who was Oakland County prosecutor from 1988-98.

Those words, precisely defined in recent weeks, have been replaced with the confidence that justice will be a matter of fact for county residents.

■ David Gorceyca, the new prosecutor, announced he would dismiss all proceedings against Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the retired West Bloomfield pathologist who has assisted 40 or so suicides.

Thompson had tried Kevorkian several times, but no jury had been willing to convict him. That should have sent Thompson a message, but it didn't. Thompson continued to beat his head — and the public checkbook — against a brick wall.

Gorceyca reviewed charges in 10 cases pending against Kevorkian and decided Jan. 11 they had been "written in haste" and "without full investigation."

Gorceyca's telling point was that there was a "low probability of conviction." Essentially, he decided it was unwise to continue hounding Kevorkian, as Thompson had done, no matter what one's moral beliefs might be about suicide. Wisely, Gorceyca knew that without a legislative mandate on assisted suicide, he would be powerless to convict.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Supreme Court is taking up the issue as to whether there is any such thing as a constitutional right to doctor-assisted suicide.

■ The Michigan Supreme Court also rebuffed Thompson in an appeal of a bad Southfield police arrest.

Southfield District Judge Bryan Levy threw out the charges and suppressed the evidence in 1992, considering the plain language of the U.S. Constitution about "search and seizure." Thompson went to Circuit Judge Gene Schnelz and lost again. He tried a third time in the Court of Appeals and won, but lost

when the defendants went to the state Supreme Court.

The average prosecutor would have had the discretion to call it quits after the second loss. Not Thompson. We have no estimate of what the appeals cost, but it had to be a bundle.

■ Thompson lost an appeal in his case against Teresa Nix, whom he wanted to charge with murder. Actually, Nix's fiancé drove around Pontiac with a raped captive in his car trunk for six days until she died.

Justice Michael Cavanagh found Thompson attempting "revisionist history of the principles underlying the double jeopardy clause..." against Nix.

"Double jeopardy" means trying someone twice for the same crime. That's what Thompson wanted to do. The U.S. and Michigan constitutions frown on that kind of persecution.

Some would argue Thompson was just "tough." Some would even call him "conservative."

It is neither tough nor conservative to hound defendants with repeated charges, disregard the Bill of Rights, throw fiscal caution to the winds, and refuse to take "no" for an answer from the courts. It is mean-spirited and vindictive.

It appears the new prosecutor, Dave Gorceyca, knows the difference. We urge him to remember it.

Furthermore, Gorceyca now has the opportunity to set his own style of management for the prosecutor's office, one that calls for aggressive law enforcement of issues that go beyond Kevorkian. Gorceyca also can show more imagination than the "policy" prosecutions of the past. Two obvious targets are putting an end to increasing gang violence in the suburbs and to organized crime.

Gorceyca shows promise in the staff he has selected. We believe that, as a team, they will be able to work well in bringing justice through the letter and spirit of the law to the community.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

40 Years ago — Jan. 24, 1957 (Enterprise)
Resurfacing major roads, widening dangerously narrow bridges and expanding the public works facilities were the reasons behind plans for a \$76,000 bond issue election approved by the Farmington City Council this week. Average homeowners were then paying \$59 a year in taxes; this plan would add \$7 a year for three years.
25 Years ago — Jan. 26, 1972
The village attorney resigned and two admin-

istrators were fired in the midst of a controversial rezoning decision by the Wood Creek Farms Village Council in Farmington Township. The attorney resigned after the board ignored his advice to hold a public hearing before the rezoning; the administrators were fired for being critical of the council's decision to rezone.
Two years ago — Jan. 19, 1995
The Farmington Hills Planning Commission gave final approval to the site plan for the controversial Timbercrest development on 12 Mile and Middlebelt, subject to a variety of approvals in landscaping, parking lot trees, signage, open space and architecture.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What are the benefits of bilingualism?



'It's like opening up a door. You can reach twice as many people'

Pat Torres
— Farmington Hills



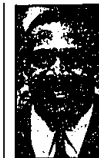
'When you go to another country, you can learn from them and teach your culture.'

Rana Shina
— Farmington Hills



'It's a good opportunity to learn about more cultures.'

Rana Shina
— Farmington Hills



'You get to understand a little more about the culture and be able to bond with the people.'

Rodrick Tarver
— Farmington Hills

LETTERS

Positive policy needed

As concerned members of the Farmington School District and as parents of Highmeadow students, we are disappointed at the negative approach the board is considering by reviewing the sibling priority rule. The rule was considered necessary when Highmeadow was simply a magnet school whose purpose was to alleviate overcrowding at the home elementary schools. Now that this school has achieved such high academic success, there is a demand throughout the district that it cannot meet.

It is obvious that many parents are dissatisfied with the quality of education being offered at the home schools; they want their children to attend Highmeadow. But the real issue here is not the sibling priority rule; the real issue concerns the quality of the learning being offered in the other elementary schools. A positive approach to the problem confronting the Board would be to seek out ways to supply the same quality of learning that Highmeadow provides in more than the one outlet in the district. A negative solution would simply dilute the caliber of learning found at Highmeadow which would lower the standards of the district as a whole.

Wouldn't it be better for the district to improve the educational experience at the home schools rather than dismantle the formula that helped Highmeadow realize its accomplishments? Perhaps it is time to consider creating another magnet school. Surely it is not beyond the financial means of the district to do so. By ending the sibling priority rule, the district will fail in its effort to meet the demands of parents who want their children to enjoy the quality of education that Highmeadow offers. We hope that this negative approach is not pursued.

Jim and Sharon Elster
Farmington

Decide for yourself

The Patterson administration is fully in favor of taxpayers deciding for themselves whether or not to support cultural institutions with increased taxes (New Years ins and outs. 1/2/97). In keeping with popular opinion in the county, (County Executive L.) Brooks Patterson has often broken ranks with other elected officials and supported the right of the voters to choose, not only on the arts issue but on the Oakland Community College tax and SMART bus system funding, which Ms. Berne so glowingly applauds earlier in the same article. Furthermore, Ms. Berne incorrectly portrays Brooks Patterson as the sole roadblock to the arts legislation when, in fact, there is

equal opposition from Oakland County Commissioners and other elected officials in Macomb and Western Wayne County.

We fully agree that cultural institutions help define the quality of life in the region. This does not mean, however, that we will support inequitable legislation designed with little or no input from the governments that will be most affected. The structure of the proposed Metropolitan Regional Council, as defined in SB 1053, puts Oakland County at an unfair disadvantage from the very start. It only guarantees that 20 percent of the roughly \$17 million tax dollars raised in Oakland County remains in the county.

More importantly, Wayne County contributes 38 percent of the total tax money raised while Oakland County contributes 42 percent, yet Wayne gets eight seats on the Metropolitan Regional Council and Oakland gets only four. A workable solution to the arts funding dilemma must first begin with enabling legislation that reflects Oakland County's substantial contribution to the program...

Steve Weikall

Oakland County Arts and Humanities Council

Thanks for coverage

We appreciate your extensive coverage of our 11th drive against war toys on Nov. 29, 1996. The stories and pictures were great!

We are grateful for your help in spreading our message of Peaceful Toys for Girls and Boys! Thank you!

Phyllis Friedman
chair, Stop War Toys 1995-96

End racism this year

The new year is coming and coming very fast. Racism and crime have always been on our minds; let us all do away with racism and crime by letting love and peace conquer over all.

Derrick D. Sims
Southfield

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.

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— Philip Power