

# Senator seeks input from Farmington teachers

BY TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

State Sen. Bill Bullard chatted with teachers Thursday in the Farmington High School media center. Nearby, an aide furiously scribbled discussion topics on a large sheet of paper: "Parental Non-Involvement," "MEAP," "High School Proficiency Test."

Following the 90-minute informal meeting, dubbed a teacher "listen-in," the 16th District Senator cradled that now-folded sheet of suggestions under his arm, ready to soon take to other state legislators.

"I hope to help establish a legislative agenda this fall," Bullard said, "and incorporate a lot of the suggestions the teachers have made. We've forgotten that teachers have valuable input. They're in the schools day-in and day-out. They have valuable advice to give us."

Among answers given by the Milford Republican, whose district includes the Farmington area:

■ He wouldn't mind giving the Michi-



All ears: Bill Bullard chats with John Carter, left, along with other teachers in the district at Farmington High.

gan Educational Assessment Program to students twice during the same year, gauging improvement among the same students rather than comparing from year-to-year.

■ There is no "secret plan" in Lansing to slash special education funding. Bullard called it an emotional subject that is best dealt with by local school districts. He said Michigan provides

education to special education students up to age 26, compared to federal requirements to offer it to those up to age 21.

"From time to time, some have said 'Should we scale it back?' he said after the meeting. 'I'm not in favor, at this time, of making any changes to special ed.'"

■ It should also be up to local districts whether to start the school year before or after Labor Day.

■ The much-maligned state High School Proficiency Test is probably going to be tweaked, with a bill expected to hit Gov. John Engler's desk in the next 3-6 months.

Possible changes: giving the test early in the senior year instead of the junior year; "doing away" with the novice category; determining whether "our cut offs are where they should be."

"I think we can restore credibility to the test," he said.

■ After dismissing the suggestion that the state Legislature might link school funding based on MEAP results, Bullard addressed Engler's recent line-

item veto of \$22 million — out of a \$11.5 billion public school budget — for at-risk students.

"Because of the Durant decision, he was looking for something he could set aside and basically use as a bargaining chip," Bullard said. "But the bargaining chip is \$22 million. And that's really not much of a bargaining chip."

Bullard said he is planning on scheduling the "listen-ins" in every school district he represents sometime this year and has already visited a few of them. Teachers unable to meet with him were invited to fill out a survey.

"You always hear some new things," he said. "The MEAP and HSPT are always an issue. But I think it's very valuable and I learn from it."

Bullard said another Michigan legislator began doing a similar program last year, and he thought it was enough of a worthwhile effort to duplicate it.

"Our job is to listen to people and teachers are one segment of the population," Bullard explained. "We go to superintendent meetings and we go to school board meetings and we have business managers who contact us."

"But never has there been an organized way to communicate directly with teachers."

His visit was praised both during and after the meeting by Power Middle School teacher Linda Regan. She credited Bullard for stopping by to find out

about what's going on in the educational trenches, from those who are there every day.

"The first thing (to tell Bullard) is to thank you," Regan said. "The second thing is, people who are not in the trenches make a lot of decisions for those who are in the trenches."

"I'm here mostly on a level that there are many of us who are doing a wonderful job. And I just want that positive message to be out."

Immediately following the informal discussion, Regan said it was "tremendous" for Bullard to take the time to hear their viewpoints. "I don't ever remember anyone asking us before."

O.E. Dunckel Middle School counselor Jerry Kaplan thanked Bullard, mostly for providing teachers a chance to express various concerns. But he didn't know whether the meeting would have a direct impact on future legislation.

"It shows he's attempting to do a good job representing his constituents," said Kaplan, as he was leaving the media center. "... They're writing things down on that board, but does that mean it's being taken back to Lansing? But it serves as a catharsis."

Dunckel sixth grade teacher John Carter said Bullard's appearance "certainly has an emotional and psychological benefit" for teachers. "Here's someone who is listening."

## Mayor gets the skinny on healthy choice goals

BY VIVIAN DeGAIR  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi has decided to join the ranks of President Bill Clinton and Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. No, he isn't going national.

Both the President and Speaker have announced some impressive weight loss results to the public, and Vagnozzi has apparently decided to try to do the same.

Before City Council Sept. 15, the mayor said that he would be participating in the Farmington Hills YMCA "Take the Pledge, Healthy People-Healthy Oakland" program.

Participants earn a T-shirt, awarded to council members Monday.

"When you take one of these T-shirts, you start with an extra-large and end with a small," Vagnozzi said.

"You will see a narrower council in our seats soon," he quipped.

Mayor-pro tem Cheryl Oliveira, who has also joined the program, said, "I've already learned that this is not a diet, it is about the way you eat, the way you exercise and the way you conduct yourself."

YMCA representative Mandi Skeegan invited the whole city to join the program sponsored by a Michigan Public Health Institute grant.

"The goal of this grant, awarded through May 1998 is to study 600 people in a community to see if they can make positive change."

The grant makes us a model that could be replicated in other communities," Skeegan said.

The Healthy People/Healthy Oakland Coalition includes 200 business, consumer and health members to introduce a healthier lifestyle to Farmington Hills residents or workers.

Employees of Farmington Hills Kroger have joined the effort, and to encourage them, management has hung a sign in the far end of the parking lot, dubbed "Healthy Parking."

Jim Perun, vice-president of operations of the Kroger Co. and a Farmington Hills resident, encouraged shoppers to sign a pledge and reduce bad habits.

The pledge, a simple questionnaire, asks for personal identification, and if the applicant currently walks, does physical activity, already eats five servings of fruits or vegetables daily, follows low fat food choices, and if they wish to participate in fun activities.

Activities range from bowling to basketball to just about anything, including running for mayor.

Sign-up meetings for Take the Pledge will be held in various community locations to include instruction about menu choices, cooking, and recreational activities available.

For information about the program, call the YMCA Farmington Branch at 553-4020.

Program information is also available on TCI Cable Channel 12 at 5:30 p.m. Mondays and 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays.

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### AGENDAS

**Farmington Hills City Council**  
City Hall, 474-6115  
7:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 22

Agenda items include:

■ Presentation honoring Alice Nichols, Farmington Area Commission 1982 Artist in Residence.

■ Presentation of \$3,000 check from Target Corp. for contribution to Family Day in the Park.

■ Presentation of \$20,000 check from Farmington Hills Foundation for Children Youth and Families for reimbursement for the Summer Youth Programming.

■ Proclamation honoring Day of Forgiveness.

■ Proclamation honoring Peter Karmanos, Jr., Compupware Corp. chairman and chief executive officer.

■ Consider tentative approval of Preliminary Plat 1 for Hickory Oaks subdivision development, south of Northwestern Highway and west of Inkster Road.

■ Consider enactment of amendment to city code to clarify exterior lighting, including height of light poles and approval of summary for publication.

■ Consider supplemental allocation of Act 51 Road Funds/Public Act 110 of 1997 and designation of paving project.

■ Under the consent agenda, the council will recommend approval of settlement contract

with AFSCME Local 1456, optical insurance; contract for the 1997 street tree planting program; award bid for purchase of a four-door fire truck to RME Fire Apparatus for \$237,173; and award bid to buy rock salt to Morton Salt for \$159,231 and to Cargill Salt for \$55,837.

**Farmington Board of Education**  
Lewis Schulman Administration Building, 489-3300  
7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 23

Agenda items include:

■ Recognition: Stacie Guerrero, William Grace Elementary School.

■ Reports: Religion in the School Study Committee; Greiner design overview; summer extended learning reading program at Gill Elementary School; comprehensive tests of basic skills; MEAP test results; Farmington Hills parks millage renewal.

■ Consideration of resolution to form district partnership in middle school alternative program.

■ Approval of bond authorizing resolution.

■ Establishment of debt and operating levies.

■ Preview of Oct. 7 study session, which will include introduction of student roundtable president and legislative update from Sen. Willis Bullard.

■ First reading of Board Policy 6141.1- Schools and Religion.

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