BELIEFS

Values

Religion and schools

Seminar teaches sensitivity

BY RENA FULEA SPECLAL WAITE Temple in Troy housed a unique, hands-on learning experience when presentations and panel discussions opened a door of understanding to a crowd as diverse as the conference itself. The March 18 symposium entitled, "Religious and Schools: The Opportunities and Challenges of Religious Diversity in Public Schools," drew teams of administrators, educators, parents and students representing 18 of Oakland County's 28 school districts. Together, they explored the cultures, rituals and bedief systems of their neighbors. "People have different roles to play in the school," said David Gad-Harf of West Bloomfield, executive director of Bloomfield, executive director of Bloomfield, executive director of Bloomfield, executive director of Bloomfield. By bringing them together, we're able to expand the impact of the program. We're reaching



Panellst: Troy High senior Nagla Fetouh talked about handling finals

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The symposium began with a keynote address by David Adamany, president emeritus of Detroit-based Weyne State University. Morning sessions examined "The Constitution and Religious Diversity in the Schools" through presentations by representatives from the Buddhist, Chaldean, Hindu, Jehovah's Witheas, Jowish, Mormon and Muslim communities. Topics ranged from diotary restrictions and modesty in dress to prayer rituals and holiday coleptations.

"For some school districts, diversity is a relatively new phenomenon," said Dr. James Geisler, superintendent of Walled Lako Public Schools. "The success in coping with the issue of diversity is in terms of accommodating students whose customs or religious backgrounds need to be death with sensitively in the school."

Student panelists brought the teenage perspective to light by discussing the daily challenges that clash with their own religious beliefs. Some students admitted feeling pressured by classmates who smoke, drink, watch R-rated movies or engage in casual sax. Others had difficulty making up lost assignments after missing school for religious observances.

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she's asked to explain her style

"On the aspect of the head cover I wear, a lot of people regard it as oppression," said Fetouh, a senior at Troy High School. "I do it because I feel it's a way of presenting to people who I am ... Look at me for who I am and not for my body."

Panelists weren't the only teens who folt a need to shure their views. With a Bible clutched in his hand, Aaron Wood of Bloomfield Hills rose from the audience on behalf of a group of his own.

"I noticed that Christians haven't been represented her and I felt a little bit left out," said Wood, a junior at Lahser High. I want to learn about other religions, but I also would have liked to be represented in even a little segment of the program."

Wood is the lender of "The Rock," a non-denominational Bible session that meets a Lahser High School for 45 minutes before classes begin, Catholic teens from the Chaldean community, who were religionally scheduled for the panel, were absent.

After a lunch offering a choice of cultural menus, the symposium continued with models of existing diversity programs facilitated by the Anti-Defamation League, Berkley High School, the Biomfield Hills School District, the Detroit-based Interfaith Round Table of the National Conference and the West Bloomfield School District, the Crigious and cultural handouts were free for the taking.

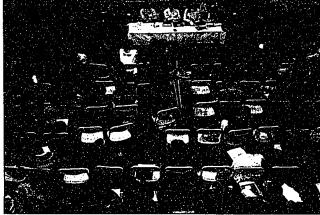
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The concept for the daylong
conference was developed
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the Jawish Community Council
of Metropolitan Detroit, the
Interfaith Round Table of the
National Conference and the
Oakland County Schools Superintendenta 'Association.

"The Metro Detroit area is
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"The Metro Detroit area is growing increasingly diverse. And if we're interested in the healthy development of our stu-dents, we must recognize that diversity as a strength," said Gary Doyle, superintendent of Bloomfield Public Schools. "It's



Packed: Dozens of administrators listen to a stu-

part of preparing kids to live successfully in the 21st Century, particularly in this global econo-

my."
Evaluations submitted by attendees will help in planning next year's religious diversity

symposium.
Rabbi Marla Feldman, assistant director of Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit, is happy with the success of the conference, which has a waiting list for attendance. But her hopes are for a wider audience.

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"The schools are the unique institutions in the community that bring togother students from a multitude of back-grounds. They welcome assis-tance in dealing with issues raised and want to be sensitive to them," said Feldman. "One of the goals is that something like this will take place at the dis-trict level in their own school systems."

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