

Don't mix it Return taxpayers' investment

The Farmington school board seems to be leaning toward a "mix and match" method of using its \$9.6 million windfall return from the state of Michigan. That would mean some money goes right back to taxpayers; other money goes toward new programs.



■ We hope that, whatever they decide, the issue is tackled soon. Voters should know before they go to the ballot box on June 8 what their board members decided ...

This money belongs to the taxpayers who footed the bill for special education programs that the state mandated, then didn't fund. As such, the taxpayers should get it back — even if it's only an average of as little as \$10 or \$12 a year taken off the bond issue tax approved by voters last year.

Of course, the school board could decide to do pretty much whatever it wants with the money, since it's the board's job to be stewards of the school district.

But we hope that, whatever they decide, the issue is tackled soon. Voters should know before they go to the ballot box on June 8 what their school board members decided to do with this money.

There are some arguments for spending and not giving it back directly to the residents. One argument is that, spread around to all its taxpayers, this \$9.6 million doesn't work out to very much money. The district can, it is said, accomplish several worthwhile projects — after-school programs, bond issue projects that didn't make the cut last year, etc. That sounds like taxpayers are getting nickled and dimed out of taxes by their government. The old "we know what's good for you" position isn't the same as saying, "Yes, voters, we trust you and if we had other requests we'd come to you with them or fit them into our regular budget."

In one view, taxpayers paid twice for these special education programs — once as local district taxpayers paying their local school taxes and a second time as part of the state's taxpayers footing the bill for the payment to the school district. As such, this shouldn't be seen as a windfall for the district — only an opportunity to pay back money that was twice-taxed for one service.

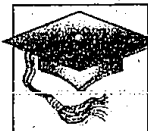
The school board has the next decision in this. This mix and match plan gives two-thirds of the money back to residents. They can say they're acting on behalf of the best interest of the children and what they believe the public really wants them to do by keeping the other third. That may be the case, and unless the public says otherwise, that seems like what will happen. Residents need to stand up and say, "These are our taxes; it's our school district; give the money back."

This becomes a credibility issue. The public supported a school bond issue last year — albeit the second time around — after school officials said these projects were needed to keep our schools on a par with other advancing school districts. Voters said yes, we will invest in the updates needed and the growth going on in the school district.

Now, it's time for the schools to return the investment.

Writing skills stay in demand

OK, so it wasn't really a shock. More of a personal disappointment, really. We speak of the general lack of interest in journalism during a recent career day at one nearby middle school. After all, the post-Watergate career boost is more than a generation behind us and those who work in the print and broadcast media have come in for a fair share of criticism in recent years for the way news is covered.



■ The ability to communicate clearly and in concise fashion — using the written word, on paper or electronically — will always be at the top of employers' wish lists.

Perceptions, as poor as they may be, are easier to dispute than numbers that show intense competition and shrinking demand for journalists and people in related fields. Only about 350,000 people held such jobs in the U.S. as of two years ago, according to "Jobs '97," a career guide published by Simon & Schuster. Of those, 59,000 people were working journalists at newspapers and 16,000 in radio, TV and wire service jobs.

Fortunately, that's only half the story here. The jobs may not be in demand, but the skills still are. The ability to communicate clearly and in concise fashion — using the written word, on paper or electronically — will always be at the top of employers' wish lists.

That's why we hesitate when we see some school districts reducing core requirements for high school graduation, particularly English and composition courses. The push in recent years has been to leave in place or even boost math and science requirements to compete in a global marketplace. Administrators are reluctant to tamper with popular electives and so traditional liberal arts courses, including English, are sometimes dropped or just not emphasized as part of a well-rounded education. Doubters might want to check MEAP reading scores, which lag behind the recent gains made in science and math.

This strikes us as a case of educators robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Think about it. Is there even one desirable job or career path where good writing skills aren't essential? "Jobs '97" lists fields expected to experience solid growth between now and 2005, including: clerical work and administrative assistants, some health care professions, teaching, technology, agriculture and the energy industry.

In addition to typical fields, an article in Working Woman magazine on top career choices in the 1990s included these interesting jobs: cross-cultural trainer (someone who helps American business people translate the manners, mores and business practices in foreign countries); diversity manager (ensuring that workers with varying backgrounds are recruited and promoted); and mature marketer (a marketing specialist to help companies tap into the exploding over-60 age demographic).

Most of these jobs require at least some post-secondary education and all feature a heavy reliance on communication skills — from providing written directions, to understanding the capabilities of computer software to navigating legal guidelines.

The message here is that computer programming and other technical training should be an adjunct to English composition, not a replacement for it. You may not be working at a newspaper in the 21st century, but you had better know how to write a memo!

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What do you do to express creativity?



"I go out with my friends. I have study groups."
Theresa Schultes
Farmington Hills



"I sing. I decorate. But, I probably get the most satisfaction out of dealing with people in the community."
Sara Woolard
Farmington Hills



"I do mine through music. I sing in the Farmington Community Chorus."
Karen Greenfield
Plymouth



"I love cooking. It's being able to combine things that nobody else sees."
Brian Thomasson
Novi

We asked this question during "Starry Night," the Farmington Festival of the Arts event Friday at the Costick Center.

LETTERS

Face serious issues, rep

In a recent article in my hometown Farmington Observer, I was quite frankly shocked and rather disappointed to learn that our freshman State Representative (Honorable Mr. Andrew Raczowski) recently co-authored his first legislation. This legislation requires calls and orders to local florists to be filled by local florists. Really, this is the one and only legislative accomplishment?

I am sure that local florists, all 10-12 of them, are quite supportive of this special interest legislation. I find myself somewhat overwhelmed, upon reflecting upon our very serious and substantive local and state problems, that Mr. Raczowski's only legislative accomplishment may benefit a few local florists.

Let's get real. We have quite serious local problems which lend themselves to state solutions that could benefit all of our community (i.e. schools, roads, my auto insurance rebate, etc.) But my local florist? Hardly.

Gerald Maxey
Farmington

Sidewalk safety is worth it

I have noticed in my cousin's neighborhood, Springland La Muera, that there are no sidewalks. This is a bad thing because my cousin is 4 years old, and it is unsafe for her to walk in the street when she goes to her friend's house with her mom. It is also unsafe because my cousin and her brother ride their bikes to the park, and they have to ride in the street.

At my grandmother's house, there are also no sidewalks. When my uncle goes on walks, he sees all of the neighbors' dogs being almost run over, even on their leashes. In my grandma's old neighborhood, there were sidewalks and not once did a dog on a leash come close to being run over.

There should be sidewalks in neighborhoods because children on bikes and pets on leashes can be run over when in the street. My aunt does not let her daughter ride to the park without her. If there were sidewalks my aunt would not worry about my cousin.

I realize putting sidewalks in neighborhoods would take a lot of time and money, but isn't it worth it to save people's and pets' lives? As far as I'm concerned, the lives of people and their pets is a top priority for a successful community. Think about it; isn't it worth it to you?

Bronwyn Mroz
Power Middle School

Thanks for tax program help

This is to express my sincere thanks to you and the Farmington Observer for helping to make our 1998 AARP Tax Counseling for the Elderly Program a huge success. Your printing of our schedules and the wonderful

article written by Mary Rodrigue were key contributors.

We prepared tax returns for clients in seven hundred and six cases. There were four hundred and one federal returns and six hundred and fifty-six cases of state returns, most of which resulted in refunds to these elderly citizens for property taxes or credits on their heating bills.

Our volunteers were at the sites on 24 days and did 1012 hours of volunteer work.

Again, thank you for your interest in this program and helping us to do this service for the community.

Bob Wightman
local coordinator
Farmington-Farmington Hills
AARP Tax-Aide Program

Do we need more addicts?

Many people now are addicted to alcoholics and addicted drug users. How many millions of dollars do they cost the good taxpayer? How many lives would be better off if they had never drank alcoholic beverages or used drugs? How many more people would be living still today, but with early death caused by drugs and alcohol are no longer with us?

To some people that is not enough. To our so-called leaders, they also think we need addicted gamblers to ruin even more lives. Reading the news, when one is desperate for money he will even fake about his very own son.

All three additives kill people, bankrupt people, break up families, help to fill the prisons with a price to the taxpayer.

Are we doing our very best when we say, "We need to make money regardless of the consequences?" Someone said the following and I think it worth considering: "Never do today, what tomorrow, you may be sorry, you did today."

Leslie Swanson
Farmington

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 and brevity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a day-time contact telephone number. No anonymous letters will be published.

The week prior to an election, this newspaper will not publish letters that discuss new issues, since last-minute attacks don't allow a chance for rebuttal. Responses to already published issues will be accepted.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335; faxed to (248) 477-9722; or e-mailed with your name, city of residence and phone number to dvarga@oe.homecomm.net

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

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

40 YEARS AGO — MAY 1, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

A group of residents in the Woodcroft subdivision objected to the proposed construction of a new elementary school west of their subdivision in section 28 of Farmington Township. The main objection was the fact that only one road was leading to the school.

The Farmington Township Zoning Board approved a 700-acre Industrial Zone between Halsted and Haggerty, the expressway and a line at what would be 9 1/2 Mile.

25 YEARS AGO — APRIL 28, 1973

The Farmington Democratic Club was "wholeheartedly" endorsing the proposed city charter for what was then Farmington Township to become a city. However, the club preferred council members to be elected by districts to allow better geographical representation.

2 YEARS AGO — APRIL 29, 1996

Betty Jean Van Dorpe was awarded the George W. Romney Award for her volunteer efforts in giving time to Children's Hospital in Detroit and serving as a substitute driver for the city's Meals on Wheels program during Volunteer Recognition Night.

Farmington Observer

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OUR MISSION: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power