

POINTS OF VIEW

Entrepreneurial government is wave of the future

Reading publications entitled "Award Winning Joint Projects" ordinarily is not the way I'd prefer to spend my time.

But this particular booklet, put out jointly by SEMCOG (Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments) and MAC (Metropolitan Affairs Coalition), turns out to be great reading. It details a bunch of joint projects undertaken by local governments in this area that both cut costs to taxpayers and improve community services.

They are part of a growing movement toward something called "entrepreneurial government," the term coming from Tim Richard, who covers governmental doings for this newspaper.

The idea is that historically governments have been pretty good at doing more and more when the revenue

base was growing, but they have proven largely clueless at doing more when revenue was shrinking. In response to this problem, some governmental leaders are trying to learn the habits of entrepreneurs, who run their businesses by finding ways to cut costs, improve productivity, innovate and even take risks.

Here's an example from Livingston County, which used to be mostly serene, rural farm country, but today is the fastest growing county in Michigan.

Going back to 1989, the Brighton Post of the Michigan State Police provided county residents with 911 emergency services. But the explosive growth of the county soon stretched to the breaking point the system's capacity, and it had to be abandoned.

At that point, government leaders in Livingston County could have



PHILIP POWER

thrown up their hands and let individual communities such as Brighton and Howell go their own separate ways in providing 911 emergency services, each with its own overhead costs. But the County Board of Commissioners authorized a study that determined that a shared countywide emergency dispatch system would

save money and improve service.

An example comes from Novi, formerly little more than the old name for the sixth (in Roman numerals, No. VI; get it?) stop on the interurban street railway, but today a mushrooming community surrounding enormous shopping malls.

In 1995, the Novi Community School District realized it needed to build new schools in response to increasing population, while the city woke up to the fact that it had better acquire some land for parks and recreation before the entire community got paved over. But the only site available was too big for either use.

Voila! Enter entrepreneurial government! Leaders from the city and the schools got together to buy 100 acres of land on 10 Mile for joint use.

Both city and school benefited from reduced costs for land acquisition and

site development. New elementary and middle schools will come on line in 1999 and 2000 to serve Novi kids. And more than 50 acres of athletic fields, tennis courts, woodlands and wetlands are now available for community residents.

I happen to believe that entrepreneurial government — the habits of mind that focus on getting more — are the wave of the future in local government. Maybe folks running for governor and for the state Legislature would like to address this idea as the campaign gets under way.

Phil Power is chairman of Home-Town Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@econline.com

LETTERS

More problems

I am writing to express my extreme dismay, disappointment and disgust with the proposed 4 by 4 block schedule for Harrison High School for the 1999 school year. As a parent of a student who is scheduled to start at Harrison at that time, I am confounded by the way this has been handled, and by the very decision itself.

As educators in local area high schools which are on block schedules, my husband and I are very familiar with the block concept. We are also aware of the multitude of studies that have been done on block scheduling, and of those which conclude that 4 by 4 have abandoned it in favor of an alternate-day schedule such as that in place at Farmington High School.

On Thursday, June 25, the Observer published a list of the pros and cons of block scheduling. While these arguments can be applied to any block schedule, they do not address the problems unique to 4 by 4, which include:

Since a class is finished in a semester rather than a year, it is highly likely that an incoming freshman would be scheduled for a math class first semester, possibly no math second semester. The following year, the student might not have math in the schedule until second semester, which means that one full year could elapse between math (or science, or language) classes. This is hardly in accord with current theory on student learning.

Low-achieving students would have to take academic classes sequentially by semester, in order to keep up, just as would the advance placement students mentioned in the article. With only four classes a semester, electives would be nearly non-existent for these students, who need them the most. No band, art, or drama to lighten the load would be unbearable for many of these students. In addition, high school should be a time of exploration, where students can dabble in subjects of interest, to get an idea of which types of careers they might want to

pursue. This would be severely limited or even precluded in such a situation.

If students chose to take their academics in sequence by semester, they could conceivably have met all of the requirements for graduation by the end of the junior year. A school full of seniors who don't need to be there is not a situation to be encouraged. Because all three schools in the district are on different schedules, graduation requirements cannot be increased, which is a usual remedy to this problem.

Adding yet another schedule format to the district mix further confounds the possibility of students taking advantage of the course offerings at one of the other schools. With three schools on identical schedules, students can travel back and forth to take a class that is not offered at their home school. With three different schedules, they cannot.

The problems that the 4 by 4 schedule would cause far exceed any benefits that would be realized. It is time

for the central administration to step up and make some decisions for all three schools. If the district is to go to block scheduling, then get everyone on board with a uniform schedule. If not, get everyone back to a traditional schedule. Site-based management is fine for activities within a building, but when site-based decisions have an impact outside of the school, some parameters must be set at the district level.

Denise Moll
Farmington Hills

Don't shortchange

Michigan residents are in danger of being duped by an organization called "School Choice Yes." This group, which is reluctant to reveal its source of financing, has mounted a campaign to drastically change the Michigan Constitution. Its aim is to coerce taxpayers into paying for private schools, something forbidden in the state Constitution. Not only would

this group like to radically change the Michigan Constitution, it would like to shortchange your neighborhood school. Scarce funds going to finance your child's education would be paid out instead in the form of tax credits. Individuals already paying private school tuition would receive a reduction in taxes resulting in reduced resources to your local school.

Michigan citizens would lose the accountability that they have come to expect from their tax dollars, once private schools become the recipients of tax credit funds. Remember that private schools are nonpublic. They are not eligible for public funds, as clearly stated in Article 8, Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution.

Thinking people must resist this lobbying effort to fragment and segregate our society. I urge the public to oppose the "School Choice Yes" agenda.

Bob Bird
Holland

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