

Poor education Don't blame teachers alone

Indeed, teachers and the public education system have taken their licks throughout the '80s and now long into the '90s. For critics, annual MEAP scores are a weapon against public education and the teachers who sit at the helm of classrooms filled with students increasingly faced with a fast-paced and changing world.

Competition squarely stands before public education in the form of private, parochial and charter schools, and home schooling. Public education's critics believe this is the way to go. Gov. John Engler is leading the call for a voucher system in which public education dollars would follow students to private education.

In one sense, there is no defense for the decline in education; in the decline in a student's ability to step out into the world as an educated citizen after 12 years of education.

But there is plenty of blame to go around. And not all of it must fall on public education and teachers. Schools today are microcosms of a changing and increasingly menacing society.

In a five-part series that concludes in today's Observer, staff writer Tim Smith has explored what the Farmington Public Schools are doing to improve and ensure quality education and to recognize a changing world.

District officials have clearly recognized that teachers must be qualified to educate their students for a technological and competitive world economy. Teachers who join the district rightly are put through hoops to ensure—as much as possible—they are the right choices for the community's children.

We support district officials' commitment to staff development, of teaching and encouraging—cajoling and whatever it takes—their teachers to try new ways of teaching to have a lasting impact on students. Students and the world in which they live change, and so must teachers and how they teach. The standards on teachers must be consistently raised to meet the demands placed on students and the world which they will enter.

The Farmington district is increasingly a diverse community, not just with varying economic levels, but a host of cultures and religions. It's not just enough that teachers embrace these diversities, but students must be encouraged to do the same so the school itself is a community. Greater attention must be placed on recruiting minority teachers and male teachers, especially for elementary and

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middle schools.

Let's not forget that today teachers must compete with all type of distractions in a student's life, including computers, the Internet, television, music and other conveniences that make us all a bit less attention driven.

Critics who wish to disparage teachers, blaming low MEAP scores squarely on these professionals have forgotten an important concept.

While the natural tendency is to measure students, and hence teachers by the annual test scores, let's be realistic. A yearly comparison is hardly an effective method of measuring progress of students who may or may not remain in the district. Long term comparison is more appropriate and useful. Yet to teach purely to pass a test is not education.

And it takes more than a school district policy, curriculum or teacher to educate a child. Education must begin and continue at home. Lessons children learn in school must be nurtured, encouraged and expanded upon at home. The effort must include lessons that are more than academic. They must include behavior and proper attitudes that allow for full learning.

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And within this environment, teachers are expected to constantly boost the MEAP scores of their students and to give their all to academics when many children come ill-prepared because of social, emotional and even physical barriers to their success.

Yes, we must be ever vigilant that standards are raised for school districts and teachers. And so must the standards on students, their parents and the community in which we live.

Simple: Trucks are too heavy

The earth is flat.

Cigarettes are good for you.

Big trucks don't wreck Michigan roads.

Few people believe any of those three tall tales. None makes sense. Your mother can tell you all three are wrong. Yet the trucking industry and some lawmakers insist the deplorable condition of Michigan roads isn't the fault of heavy trucks that are unique to Michigan.

Most states in the Union limit truck weights to 40 tons. Michigan and Louisiana allow 82-ton monsters. One need only cross the border of I-75 and US-23 into Ohio, or I-69 and I-94 into Indiana to realize Michigan roads are taking an unnecessary pounding.

The issue arose in mid-1994 when the Legislature—after a decade of neglect under two governors—got around to raising fuel taxes. Lawmakers voted down an amendment to lower truck weight limits.

The issue resurfaced, along with some new data, in Lansing recently when two Macomb County senators introduced a bill to cut truck weight limits over five years.

Democrats Art Miller and Ken DeBeauvoir say they have support from such Republicans as Transportation Committee Chair Phil Hoffman, Bob Geake of Northville, whose district includes Livonia, Plymouth, Canton and Redford, and David Jaye of Macomb County.

Certainly they have support of most Michigan motorists.

Certainly they have support from people familiar with the freeze-thaw, freeze-thaw cycles of southeastern Michigan winters. Our roads are susceptible to potholes because of the erratic weather. The 82-ton trucks make things worse.

The trucking industry, along with lawmakers sensitive to its lobbyists, say it's axle weight, not gross weight, that counts. They say an 11-axle, 42-wheel cement hauler

But even if your own eyes don't convince you big trucks cost the rest of us big money for big road repairs, consider the traffic crash evidence.

doesn't do any more damage than other vehicles.

They say.

But even if your own eyes don't convince you big trucks cost the rest of us big money for big road repairs, consider the traffic crash evidence.

Of the people killed in 1996 in two-vehicle crashes involving a passenger vehicle and a large truck, 98 percent were occupants of the passenger vehicles—so says the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Large trucks in 1995 accounted for 3 percent of registered vehicles, 7 percent of miles driven and 12 percent of all passenger vehicle occupant deaths—again from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Evidence is mounting that senior citizens, with slower reflexes, are particularly likely to get hurt in crashes with trucks.

Large trucks are especially dangerous in southeastern Michigan, where "tailgating" is a way of life. Loaded tractor-trailers take 20 to 40 percent further than cars to stop. Unloaded rigs have a tendency to "jackknife." Fatalities such as the one on the east side of I-94 a couple of weeks ago—the one where a trucker slammed into an ambulance—will become more common as our roads become more crowded.

We encourage area lawmakers not to let the truckers blow smoke into their minds with their "axle weight" fables. The 82-ton trucks are more dangerous than other vehicles. Michigan can't afford more fuel taxes and more deaths because of its too lenient truck-weight law.

Worthy cause



STAFF PHOTO BY LEE CANNON

Linked: When else can you count on more than 200 golfers and another 100 non-golfers to come through for a worthy cause? Here Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer, Red Wing player Darren McCarty and John Ginopolis of Ginopolis restaurant, get things rolling for the annual Farmington Hills Police Benevolent Association's Golf Classic to raise money to help police, fire and city employee families struck by tragedy.

LETTERS

We're blessed

We are indeed fortunate to live in a community-inhabited by kind and honest people. I only wish I knew the name of a particular person in our town who represents all the finest qualities one could desire in a neighbor.

One day last week I was out doing errands and, as most people do nowadays, I was charging with my Visa. At one of my last stops I was about to make the Bankard Company happy once more when I found that my charge card was missing. I was debating whether to put a stop on the card or to retrace my steps in hopes of recovering it. I decided on the latter. I returned to my previous stops asking whether a charge card had been found, but no luck.

Just before going home I stopped at a Rite Aid to pick up some photos. As the clerk handed me the package I noticed a note on the front of the envelope "Call your husband at home." When I reached my husband he informed me that my missing card was waiting for me at the Farmington Hills Library. This was odd because I hadn't been at the library all day.

As it turned out, one of the office staff at the library had called and said it was found at the post office by a woman who recognized my name. For a number of years she had received literature from me while I had been president of the Friends of the Library. She thought the library would give me a call.

Once again, I don't know who you are, but thank you so much for your kindness and honesty.

You read about so many unkind acts today, it's nice to know that we are blessed with special people like you who live in Farmington/Farmington Hills.

Roslynne Greenberg
Farmington Hills

We're proud

It's been about four years now since the city purchased what was known as Mercy Center to house its Senior Adult Division programs. What a positive move that was we thought back then and continue to think so today.

We are writing to encourage our generation of Baby Boomers living here who will, in the upcoming years, qualify to participate with others here "55 or Better" to join in using this wonderful civic asset.

Activities at the William Costick Center run the gamut. There are classes in a wide variety of avenues to stimulate your mind, body and heart. This fall, for instance, there's ballroom dancing lessons, a fall color walk with a city naturalist guide, a book discussion group, computer forums/classes (i.e., this month features Computers Don't Bite presented by our community library), painting class, Tai Chi, swimming, gymnasium activities, and the always popular bingo/bridge sessions.

The original travel program's itinerary reads like Robinson Crusoe. This fall alone, trips are planned to playhouse theaters in Canada and Pennsylvania, as well as casino trips, and the Grand Traverse Dinner Train state tour. Glitzy trip destinations include the Colorado Rockies, Hawaii, Beijing and Portugal.

Transportation services range from medical, lift-equipped van rides for medical appointments, and regular van service for grocery and mall shopping trips, to shuttle rides to/from the Senior Center.

The city has even arranged for the U.S. Postal Service to make its services available at the Senior Center on a limited schedule.

All this is why, the first chance that we qualified, we intend on actively participating in this gem among us, one that our city has polished so bright, so blue. Any way you cut it, we're proud to be active residents of Farmington Hills.

Jim and Marilyn Vandenberg
Farmington Hills

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.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 248-477-9722.

Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALUSZKOWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450
SUSAN ROSEK, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149
HUGH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118
KATHY HIRSCHFIELD, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 248-901-2501
LARRY GORDON, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234
BANKS M. DISHMON, JR., PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252
RICK FICORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

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— Philip Power.