

Accountability

Parent is right to question

Mark Mergener, the Farmington High School parent who has complained to district officials about the reported behavior of certain teachers, is not out of line for his concerns.

He should be lauded for having the courage to stand up and demand to be heard. That takes gumption. More importantly, he isn't giving up. Nor should he. As a parent and a taxpayer in the school district he has every right to expect a high standard of behavior from teachers.

Mergener has been upset about the use of certain classroom materials and the reported use of profanity. In the past two years, he and his wife, Anita, have met with Farmington High officials and district officials.

Superintendent Bob Maxfield says each incident reported by Mergener has been reviewed and dealt with. Mergener, however, remains concerned and frustrated.

Mergener wants a teacher code of conduct. He believes it won't work. A code of conduct will become yet another set of tangled rules when there is already a process in place to address grievances against teachers.

Mergener may not trust the district to follow through with reprimands or even suspensions for certain teacher behavior, but a code of conduct that must be approved by union members — which teachers are — will prove to be unenforceable.

He must also recognize that his complaints must not paint the entire teaching staff with a broad brush. Insensitive or less than admirable behavior may be worth a talking to or a reprimand but should not indict the entire staff, the majority of whom are excellent educators and role models for the students they teach.

We would prefer to trust that teachers, as adults and as the role models they are, recognize that their behavior must be held above reproach, and that they will be held accountable, not only by the individual school and school district, but by parents. In a professional setting, there is no greater punishment than peer group pressure.

What our society lacks is a sense of decorum and sensitivity. While chivalry died long ago, that's no excuse for failing to recognize other people's needs, sensitivities and sensibilities.

Teachers should not attempt to be one of the students either by the use of profanity or by less than admirable behavior. There are plenty of other ways to reach and communicate with the younger generation.

It is also incumbent upon teachers to raise the standards and expectations of behavior in the classroom. Expectations for good behavior and decent language must be placed on students as well.

One only has to walk into a high school today to hear the most detailed and creative use of profanity coming from teenagers' mouths. Somewhere out there students have learned to bastardize the English language without penalty.

What's good for the teachers is good for others. We expect parents to teach their children how to behave and speak in public. And school is a public place where proper behavior, language and dress are required.

Mergener also has complained about the use of certain educational materials, such as books and movies he feels are inappropriate because of profanity and sexual content.

In particular, Mergener took exception to *The Color Purple* as recommended — not required — reading in a sophomore class.

The school district requires teachers to receive permission from principals and parents to show R-rated movies or to require reading of potentially objectionable books and magazines.

Giving parents an option as to whether their child may see a particular movie or read a particular book far surpasses any attempt at wholesale censorship.

Indeed, *The Color Purple* is a descriptive book, and perhaps one that many teens may misinterpret. The language in the book is downright raunchy. But that alone does not negate the purpose of using the book as an educational tool, nor does it mean that anyone who reads it will be tainted.

That's why parents must play a role in their children's education. The parent and the teacher together should be able to determine what a particular child can handle and understand in the context in which it was intended.

Teachers who take matters into their own hands and present materials that have not passed through the district's approval process should be questioned and if need be, reprimanded.

Mergener's heart is in the right place. As a parent he is well within his rights to be concerned about the behavior of teachers and their impact on students. The school board and school officials must demand higher standards of behavior from teachers and students. Education includes learning how to speak to others, how to respect others and how to treat others.

Proms are beginnings, not ends

At 17 or 18 years of age, many teens feel like they're invincible. Like they wear an invisible suit of armor that will protect them from harm: speeding or driving wrecklessly on the roads, chugging beer or popping pills, hanging out with unsavory characters, nothing bad will ever happen to them. Sure.

It is to parents, teachers and other responsible adults that this is addressed.

Believe it or not, as we've seen here in Farmington in the past first hand, there are some parents who host beer parties for their underage children and their friends. (\$5 a head, all the beer you can drink). Get with the program, people!

With prom season on the horizon and graduation and end-of-year parties not far behind, be cognizant about your son or daughter's

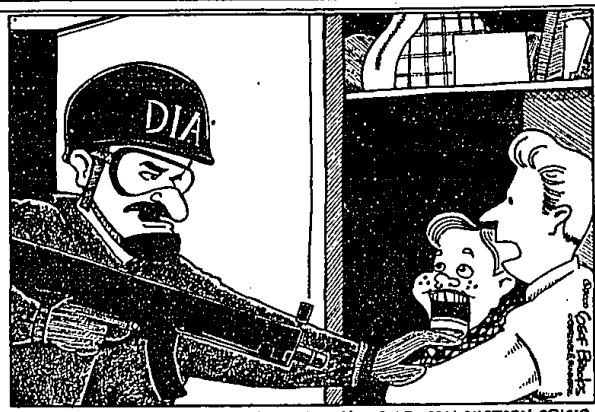
whereabouts. If you're hosting a party, make sure it's alcohol-free. If they're going elsewhere, find out who they're with and where they're going. Stress to them the importance of celebrating without substance abuse.

If you have to, arrange a visit to a rehabilitation center so they can see firsthand what life is like for teenagers sitting paralyzed in wheelchairs or with closed head injuries — kids who have to re-learn life skills as simple as eating and dressing themselves. Certainly those teens never thought it would happen to them, either.

Fun can be had without getting blind drunk or sky high, without driving like you're in test trials for the Indianapolis 500.

Proms and graduations are wonderful milestones to celebrate. They should be thought of as beginnings. Not ends.

GEOFF BROOKS



THE DIA TAKES ACTION TO END THE HOWDY DOODY CUSTODY CRISIS.

LETTERS

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, that's why we offer this space for your opinions. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity we ask that you provide a contact telephone number and if mailing or faxing a letter, please sign it. Letters can be mailed to: Joanne Maliszewski, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oc.homecomm.net

Shocked and appalled

What is the function of the Farmington Police Department? Are they so over-staffed and underworked that harassment, rather than help, becomes their avocation?

My 20-pound beagle puppy recently sneaked out an open door of our home while we were unloading groceries. Upon discovering that she was missing I mobilized the household and five of us scoured the house, neighborhood, surrounding streets and city park for our "family member," only to discover she had been whisked away to puppy jail by the city police. Not only were the police unwilling to reunite us, insisting she remain behind bars for the night to consider her crimes, but officer Barney Fife went on to issue me a citation for a stray dog violation.

A sleepless night of worry and separation from snugly buddy was followed by a mandatory trip to the local police department to pay bail, prove shots and current licensing and get a release form to spring the furry criminal. Now I am left with a city ordinance citation that demands an appearance at an arraignment; the spine-chilling words "stray dog" emblazoned in my brain in reference to my sweet little beagle doggy; and worst of all, additional police cars continually driving by my house. What is the rate of recidivism for jailed dogs?

While I am obviously very bitter about the lack of courtesy and assistance, this story, now retold to numerous people including other law enforcement professionals who are as shocked and appalled as I am, has prompted some good questions.

Why does the city of Farmington even need its own police/fire department for our 2.7 square miles containing 10,016 citizens, at an annual cost of over \$1.8 million? Would it not be more cost effective to share public services with Farmington Hills?

Leah Brewer
Farmington

Wrong picture

My name is Larry Bohner and I am one of the four representatives of Farmington Hills on the Cable Access Committee.

The issue about which I would like to make a brief statement is the decision by Time Warner to drop C Span II from its cable lineup.

When I learned of this last month, I decided to log a few of the programs I watched on C Span II as part of my normal viewing habits. Coincidentally, my first note was March 15 and C Span II was a panel discussion at George Mason University on Internet issues. Time Warner's new boss, Steve Case of AOL, spoke about the future of the Internet and cable and how important it was to keep the information flowing.

Representatives Rick Boucher, a Democrat, and Bob Goodlatte, a Republican — this was non-partisan — were speaking about Congress developing a legislative framework to govern the Internet, something that will affect the lives of everyone there that night. Rep. Goodlatte stated that the Internet is the greatest technological advance in the history of mankind for empowering the individual. If there ever was a case — and this is not meant to be a pun — for keeping C Span II on the air, this panel discussion was it.

I'm sure AOL Chairman Case would agree and would not want his very thoughtful message denied to the viewers in Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi.

That same day Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji was being questioned at a news conference about the crisis with Taiwan which the United States is very nervous about and would, again, affect all of us if there was military action.

In summary, Time Warner has acted irresponsibly by eliminating C Span II. The cable companies fund C Span I & II and I applaud them for that, but to turn around and deny to their viewers this wonderful service is incredulous.

Please believe me when I say the cable subscribers of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi are thoughtful and intelligent people who have concerns about the issues which will impact their lives. You mock us by removing C Span II from your lineup. Last night when I might have been watching C Span II, I saw that ESPN 2 and the Classic Sports Channel, 30 and 32, were both showing the same program — the 1983 Masters Golf Tournament — but still no C Span II. What's wrong with this picture?!

Please, I urge Time Warner, and my friends and neighbors urge you to return C Span II to your cable lineup.

Larry Bohner
Farmington Hills

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Describe your ideal Mother's Day.

We asked this question of moms by the post office and, being moms, they were too kind to ignore the photographer pestering them for an answer.



"Have all the family together, grandchildren included. Presents are not necessary."
Betty Bernis
Farmington Hills



"We'll go to church. My son Dave (and daughter-in-law) Kerl are taking me out to brunch at the Fairlane Club."
Alice Burgess
Farmington Hills



"To get up and not have to do a thing. Actually, this Mother's Day I graduate from college."
Madeline Mott
Farmington Hills



"I would like to go to a craft and art fair Saturday. I'd like my husband to take the kids so I could be alone for a while."
Jeanine Gresock
Milford

Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALISZEWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450, jmaliszewski@oc.homecomm.net
HUGH GALLAGHER, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149, hgallagher@oc.homecomm.net
PEB KHOSPEL, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177, pkhospel@oc.homecomm.net
TROY GIBSON, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2118, tgibson@oc.homecomm.net
RICK PICKRELL, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150, rpickrell@oc.homecomm.net
JIM JIMMICKSON, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR, 734-953-2180, jjimmickson@oc.homecomm.net
SUSAN ROMEX, PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100, sromex@oc.homecomm.net
BARBARA DISHMON, VP/CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, 734-953-2252, bdishmon@oc.homecomm.net
HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

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— Philip Power