

Vouchers from page A1

translate to fair choice opportunities for less-affluent families;

■ Whether private schools would pick and choose students for available slots;

■ Whether there is a sufficient system of accountability for private and parochial schools.

Parents who attended the Longacre PTA-sponsored session now will go out into their neighborhoods and attempt to communicate with those who could not be there. Others will have future opportunities. Similar meetings are being held across the district and will continue all summer and into the fall.

"This is the first time anybody's sat down with us and unemotionally gone through the issues," said parent Cathy Davis. "People are usually ranting and raving. I think this (meeting) is good, although obviously they (board members) are against vouchers."

Davis, who promised to be "talking to people to see what they say," formerly was in favor of implementing a voucher system. Now, she is changing her tune.

"Education is a public good," she emphasized. "It's a public responsibility to educate every

child and not just someone who might be president of a corporation."

She added that parents who want public education to improve could go about that in ways other than approving a constitutional amendment.

Get ready

Annette Jones, another Longacre parent, also said she intends to talk to parents about the subject, so that they aren't blindsided by the forthcoming ad campaign by the likes of Kids First! Yes!, Dick DeVos of the Amway Corp. and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

Jones, who has two children with special needs, said other parents of special needs children should listen up about the amendment. The main reason why a successful ballot proposal would result in less money for state-funded special education.

Public districts would lose per-pupil funding for those who left for private/parochial schools; but special ed kids would be left behind, along with the burden of paying for their education, according to opponents.

"They (districts) would have to

take money from other programs, such as music, art and special ed" to make up for the budget shortfall of losing students, Jones said.

According to Priscilla Brouillette, parents would "have the right to apply" for vouchers, but "only the school will decide who attends."

Not so fast, said an official for the Midland-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy. "First of all, this plan does not take anything away from the options that are available right now," said Matt Brouillette, director of educational policy for the Mackinac Center. "It's just expanding the opportunities. It says children in failing districts will have a chance of escape."

He cited a recent newspaper survey of parents from Detroit Public Schools, in which tuition and transportation were listed as the top two likely obstacles preventing them from signing up for schools of choice.

Of the two, transportation problems could be overcome.

"They would find a way to get their children to school if they could afford it," Matt Brouillette said.

During the videotape, Farmington school board members Priscilla Brouillette, Gary Sharp and Janet Holm of the district's area council PTA discussed complex issues such as accountability. (The video was paid for by private citizens.)

Sharp said vouchers might encourage "fly-by-night" school districts, with no need for MEAP tests, open meetings or public disclosure.

"There is no way to know how much money would be earmarked for religious content," continued Sharp, who emphasized he is not anti-religious, but only a strong proponent of the separation of church and state in schools.

Matt Brouillette, meanwhile, said private and parochial schools have a better means of accountability than do public school districts, which he said only have "political" accountability.

"We have something called consumer sovereignty," he said. "Parents hold these schools accountable... not rules and regulations from the Legislature."

He said he is ready for the coming months of debate. But even if the amendment is



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BUSHMAN

The down side: Board member Priscilla Brouillette explains problems with the proposed voucher system.

approved on Nov. 7, and a voucher system takes hold, public schools still could benefit.

"We're already seeing that with limited school choice" such as charter schools, he said. "... Public schools are beginning to see students as customers to be served rather than a captive audience."

Mom from page A1

honored by American Mothers at an awards banquet May 13 at the Troy Marriott Hotel.

Paula Fader-Garff of Ann Arbor, president of the organization's Michigan association, said the group doesn't seek for Mother of the Year honors "star women who are necessarily out in the forefront of everything, but women who represent all motherhood, moms with whom people from all walks of life can identify."

"Motherhood is a great calling, and should be honored," she said. "We salute the Mother of the Year, obviously, with that in mind. Motherhood and mothering are essential for the welfare of our society. We make an effort to recognize the great sacrifices mothers make for us as human beings and as a society."

Kelly has long been active with the Church of Jesus Christ

of Latter Day Saints, performing acts of charity and helping young people grappling with issues ranging from morality and drugs to sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancy. She's written several well-received plays on self-esteem, morality and women in the Scriptures.

A former state president of American Mothers, Kelly's impressive resume is eight pages long. She lists her marriage and five children — Kimberly, Christopher, Molly, Matthew and Michael — as her greatest accomplishments. The Kelly children are all college graduates leading successful lives. "I asked each of them what they felt were my greatest contributions to their lives," she said.

They said tucking them in at night with prayer, back scratches and talking one-on-one, giving them encouragement, faith and

hope, acts of service helping those in need, developing holiday traditions, having a home where their friends felt welcome and could call me 'Mom,' and always being there and involved at home, school, church, activities, and now in their own families," said Kelly. "After school I would position myself in a chair before the children came in from school, ready to ask how their day went."

"Although I deem this an honor, it doesn't elevate me over anyone else," said Kelly. "What it does do is focus on the importance and value of motherhood. The real honor in being a mother comes many times much later in life when your kids become responsible, valuable citizens in the world."

Kelly stays close to her kids even when they're miles away. "Our family has a tradition of making a pillowcase for anyone

who's going away for an extended period. Each family member writes a note and draws a picture on the pillowcase, so every night he or she remembers we love, pray and think of him or her wherever they may be. An apron is also made for the day-time when they are making meals. When our children have returned home, they all have had these two well-used items in their possession."

Kelly's own youth influenced her parenting philosophy. "My mother was a second-grade teacher, and because of her responsibilities, wasn't always there. My brother and sister were older," she said. "I decided I wanted my children to be raised together and that I would be there."

She views motherhood as a

divine calling. "The call to parent is a sacred and serious career choice," Kelly said. "Once a woman has borne the great responsibility of a child, she owes that child herself. There is no greater responsibility, blessing, mission or obligation more binding than parenting. This is God's work and reliance on Him is crucial. Few things in this life require more effort, care, attention, love, prayer and faith than being a parent."

Kelly emphasized one of the reasons American Mothers remains relevant. "When we find out we're going to have a child, we're told what to eat, what exercises to do, and what to expect through the delivery process. We are even walked through a hospital to show us where to go and what will hap-

pen. We can attend classes for Lamaze and are taught how to bathe the baby."

"Then we have that baby. The doctor places the baby in our arms and says, 'Here you go.' As a mother, we are no longer walked through anything. That is why it is so important to me to realize that motherhood is a divine career. Without God's help, prayer, and the good examples of other people, it would be almost impossible to do."

Parenting can be so challenging that it's not unusual to see mothers "beating themselves up after losing their tempers," said Kelly. "We need to forgive ourselves as long as we are doing the best job we can. This is our career, and if we are dedicated to it, we will be blessed."

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