

'Ratings Game'

Skit challenges first impressions of schools

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First impressions of the quality of school districts can be superficial and aren't always useful or accurate, something Farmington Public Schools officials wanted to illustrate during the recent "Ratings Game" skit.

During the skit, "contestant" Janet Holm of the Farmington Area PTA Council had to give personal impressions of three school districts simply on snippets of tailored information.

Meanwhile, sitting on stage, opposite a partition from Holm, were three fictitious "school districts," represented by Heather Trapchak, Jerry Fouchey and Denise Gundie White of Farmington Public Schools.

All three attempted to answer Holm's questions in such a way as to land her allegiance as a prospective customer.

Emcee for the evening's festivities at Farmington Training Center was Richard Strauss, in the Mod-attired role of hip host "Chad Stylus."

In best 20-Questions fashion, contestant Holm fired off a stream of questions about everything from the quality of curriculum, arts programs and food service offerings to the level of parent volunteerism.

Following are a few Q & A examples from "The Ratings Game":

■ What percentage of parents attends PTA meetings?

One district answered 73.5 percent, while a second said "at the meeting we served pizza, 81 percent."

■ What role does fine arts education play in your district?

"We have an award-winning kazoo department," responded one of the district reps.

A second mentioned how the district won state awards for band and orchestra competitions. The third noted how its students had a special exhibit at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

■ How many computers do you have in your district?

"One, but it's used all the time," was one response.

"We're worried using computers before adulthood takes away from time learning long division," was another.

The third district rep noted that every student has access to a computer.

After the skit, which was videotaped for airing on the district's TV-10, community members and district staffers broke off into groups to delve into discussions about what are considered more meaningful indicators of student success.

Among the participants was Harrison High School teacher Laura Sparrow.

"I led a breakout group of senior high parents," Sparrow said. "One parent from North said we need to (focus on) the

importance of people skills because... stress is everywhere."

Other suggestions included requiring all high school students: complete community service as a graduation requirement (such requirements are mandatory only at North Farmington, Sparrow said); undertake an all-encompassing senior year project.

"You don't graduate unless you do a performance on a subject you choose, to display your knowledge," said Sparrow, recalling the suggestion.

The ideas will be looked at in the coming weeks by the district's assessment department, led by director Barbara Cherem.

Superintendent Bob Maxfield

said the program is part of a continuing effort to gauge what parents and other community members consider to be important in judging a district's performance.

"You can pull all kinds of stuff" to influence an opinion, Maxfield

said, referring to the game show skit. "What Barb (Cherem) is trying to say is you need consistent indicators of quality that can be sustained over time, that the community believes are important."



PHOTO BY AME KURTSON

Rate a district: From left, Heather Trapchak, Jerry Fouchey, Denise Gundie White and host Richard "Chad Stylus" Strauss of Farmington Public Schools participate in the "Ratings Game." The skit, a take-off of the 1960s game show "Dating Game," was designed to show how easily someone's opinion of a school district can be skewed by tailoring their responses.

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Game participants rank community concerns

The items from Farmington schools community "stakeholder" groups at the "Ratings Game" meeting are listed here in order of strength of priority of responses.

Participants each had five votes for the 22 items.

The number of votes each item received follows the item in bold.

The group focused on student "success indicators" that might be surveyed or measured (in addition to standardized tests).

The meeting was a beginning point whereby the community could express their thoughts, organizers stressed.

"Are schools creating responsible citizens?" was the number one concern. The list below was provided by the school district.

In order of preference

1. Responsible citizen (percent of kids involved in community service; attitudinal measurement (how has it affected them; recognizing an obligation to the larger community) (17)
2. Arts and humanities - participation and exposure (Percentage of kids involved; use of the arts as a "carrier" for other learning (16))
3. Sixth-grade parent and student survey (cognitive and affective) to assess K-5 experience and middle school readiness (14)
4. Number of kindergarten students who had a quality early childhood educational experience (e.g., number of children enrolled) (12)
5. Percentage of parent involvement in schools (e.g., participation in student-involved conferences, participation in child's goal-setting) (11)
6. Identify student interventions and report out

the success (e.g., literacy groups (DELTA) (8)

7. Portfolios - performance - progress (including student involved conferences) showing student-identified strengths and weaknesses (8)

8. Evidence of student leadership (8)

9. Student survey - 40 developmental assets (to identify possible at-risk students) (7)

10. Testing (lower-scoring students-bottom 20 percent; percent of totals taking ACT/SAT/AP tests; more thorough breakdown of results) (7)

11. How is the school meeting the student profile and multiple intelligences? (6)

12. Teacher satisfaction - morale, resources, time, etc. (5)

13. Early intervention and long-term programs that are successful (explained to community) (5)

14. What are the goals of the elementary study? How is it progressing on district and building level? (5)

15. Reading levels - reading recovery from leveled books (4)

16. Simple on-the-spot evaluations (indicators for teachers) (4)

17. People skills (recognizing others' gifts; valuing those gifts; valuing those gifts; using them, especially in teamwork) (4)

18. Percentage of teachers teaching in their major and minor fields (4)

19. Technology - Is it worth it? (What skills do we want; are they demonstrated; are they used in kids' lives?) (3)

20. Participation in extra curricular academic activities (3)

21. Opportunities to explore interests in careers and personal skills (3)

22. Surveys disaggregated by role of grads (academic or not) (3)

State of the Cities fete is in February

The Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Caledonia North America and LOC Federal Credit Union, is pleased to announce that the 2000 State of the Cities Breakfast will be held from 7:30-9:30 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 27 at Vladimir's in Farmington Hills.

This annual event will feature Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff, Farmington Hills City Manager Steve Brock and Superintendent of Farmington Public Schools Dr. Robert Mair.

These key community leaders will be on hand to share information about new developments that contribute to the overall growth and stability of our region.

Also participating in the program will be Farmington Mayor Bill Hartsock, Farmington Hills Mayor Nancy Bates and School Board President Linda Enberg.

"This is an excellent opportunity for the community to gain first-hand knowledge from our key community leaders about

projects and events that affect the way we live and do business in our communities," says Carl Leigh Flaherty, chamber president. "As an advocate for economic and community development, the chamber views this event to be one of the most critical educational venues offered to our business community."

A buffet breakfast will be served prior to the presentation from 7:30-8 a.m. Cost to attend the breakfast is \$20 for those who register by Thursday, Feb. 15, or \$25 thereafter. Deadline for reservations is Friday, Feb. 23.

In an effort to encourage attendance from the general public, the chamber will offer seating for guests who wish to attend the presentation only. Guests attending only the presentation will be seated at 8 a.m. Advance notice of attendance for those attending only the presentation is appreciated and may be made by calling the chamber office at 474-3440.

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