

Farmington Observer

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Democratic process could heal Sorrows rift

For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.
Hosea 8:7

When officials from Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School first approached Farmington Public School District about providing teachers for arts, music and physical education, they made one very startling mistake.

They didn't first talk to everyone who would be most affected by the decision.

A small group of people within the church community knew, but many parents have come forward to say they had no idea - and if they had been told, would have opposed it from the beginning. Sorrows parents by the score have attended informational meetings, signed petitions, submitted letters and spoken out at public meetings organized by a core opposition group.

Last week, Farmington School Board members quite rightly put this issue on the table, until parents and OLS administrators and church officials have time to work out their differences. At a time when the public school district is relying on every single dollar of projected revenue to deal with millions in red ink, that couldn't have been an easy decision.

Or maybe it was. Board member Priscilla Brouillette, who first offered, then withdrew, the motion to approve the shared-time agreement, put it best: "This goes completely against my feeling as a public servant, that you haven't been heard."

Parents who pay private school tuition often talk about being doubly taxed, and we're not going to delve into that argument here. But the parents at Sorrows have every right to demand their tuition be used to ensure an education that is entirely faith-based, from arithmetic to

zoology and everywhere in between.

Parents also have the right to defend the decision to "hire out" public school teachers. We can see plenty of reasons - for the financial health of the school, to keep those tuition rates affordable to more students, to tap into Farmington's award-winning K-12 music department, just for starters.

Our point is: Both sides should have been heard.

Bringing public school teachers into a private school environment is an earth-shaking issue for parents, particularly those who are passionate about their child's education. We believe church officials could have avoided most or all of this difficulty by grounding their decision with the majority, ensuring a stable base of support before taking what Farmington Superintendent Bob Maxfield called "this leap of faith."

We hope that's what they do now, with additional time to sort out this thorny issue.

Is it worth sacrificing the inclusion of faith-based teaching in these three curricula? Believing that public school courses incorporate, rather than exclude, a diversity of religious themes, we might argue that it is.

But we're not the ones paying thousands for our own children's education and to support public schools.

The people who deserve to be heard, deserve the indulgence of a process that will allow everyone a seat at the table and not just a select few. Private schools aren't a democracy, but employing its grassroots origins in this instance might go a long way toward calming this whirlwind of controversy and getting everyone back to the business at hand.

In case we've all forgotten, it's this: Doing what's best for the children.

Afterthought: It started Monday morning, this steady stream of people in our office (some of whom work here) complaining about a construction. That's when Road Commission #2 and Oakland County workers closed off Farmington Road from Nine Mile to Grand River, thus effectively bottlenecking traffic for yet another season of road construction. Folks, we don't like it any more than you do. But when you get tired of the delays, the honking horns, the irate drivers and confusing detours, do yourself a favor - take a long, slow drive down Farmington Road SOUTH of Nine Mile and remember better roads are only half a year away.

It's time to stop cuts in mental health care

It isn't necessary to go all the way to Texas to see the value of mental health care - although Andrea Yates' conviction in the death of her children seems the best possible example of what happens when people with mental illness don't get proper care.

Most don't suffer so spectacularly, in such a wash of media attention. They and their families live each day trying to balance a world that is permanently tilted, to live with imperfection and the struggle to find "normal."

Decades ago, mental health professionals and advocates successfully - and rightly - convinced lawmakers to move away from warehousing people with mental illnesses in state institutions. Now in Michigan, local mental health boards have been charged with ensuring people get the services and help they need.

However, there will always be a group of people whose state of mind necessitates their being hospitalized long-term, either for their own protection or that of those around them. And we are doing less and less to protect them.

According to the Michigan Department of Health, local boards served 206,000 people state-wide in 1998. Last year, in Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties, 86,000 people received help through this "managed care" system. But it's a system woefully underfunded and about to be crippled by yet another state budget cut of \$100 million.

Worse yet, the Mental Health Association in Michigan, an advocacy group, estimates more than a million Michiganders have some kind of mental health issues, an indication that many people who need help right now may not be getting it.

The State has announced plans to sell one of its last remaining psychiatric hospitals, located in Northville, within three years. While politicians argue over what's going to happen to the 300

patients housed there, keep in mind that 10 psychiatric hospitals were closed in the 1990s. Where have all those people gone? How many are in our jails, how many have disappeared down the rabbit hole of homelessness?

Detroit Medical Center in January announced plans to curtail emergency psychiatric services, on the road to the county's rebidding community services in October. Officers bring 20 to 30 people a day into the facility; hospital officials say they've served about 15,000 emergency psychiatric patients annually.

What's going to happen to those people?

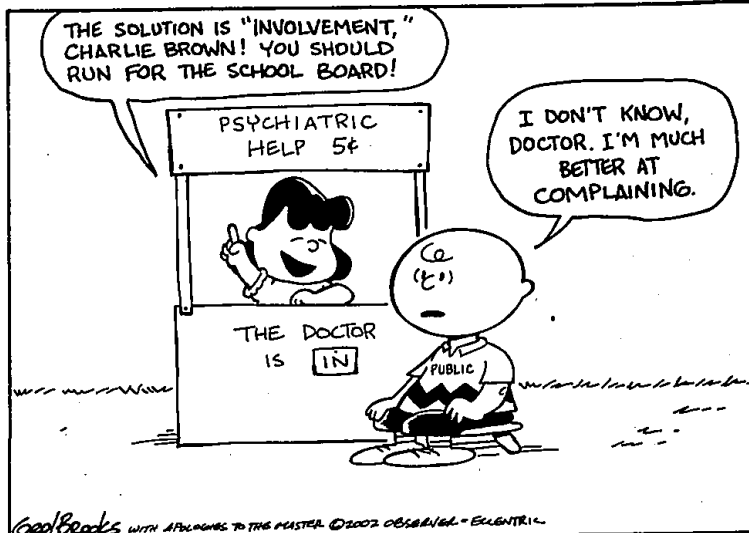
It seems to us that closing any of the few remaining facilities and slashing badly needed funding is the last thing our state government should be doing, especially at a time when we have all been touched by depression, anger and stress in the wake of a national trauma.

Already, Michigan uses publicly operated beds at half the national average, a fact the Association calls one of the state's "premier mental health service gaps." Recently, State Rep. Andrew Raczowski (R-Farmington Hills) proposed reserving space in local hospitals, so that psychiatric treatment can remain a family issue and those important ties with friends and loved ones can be used to help in a patient's recovery.

But that can't and shouldn't be accomplished without the state picking up its fair share of the burden. Without significant public pressure, we don't see that happening.

Mental health issues won't simply disappear as our state continues to dismantle its system of caring for its vulnerable citizens. Someday, something so spectacularly tragic as the case of Andrea Yates will come to Michigan. We will wonder how this could have happened here.

And if we do nothing now, we will have only ourselves to blame.



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LETTERS

■ Pride in every kid

Our family has lived in Farmington Hills for 27 years, and we are still surprised at the letters you receive from the Harrison football program. Why are members of the community jealous of the wonderful program we have at Harrison?

Coaches Herrington and Sutter were JV coaches at North Farmington and when Harrison High School opened in 1971, they started the football program at Harrison. Through the years, they have developed a first rate program, but more importantly, they developed "Hawk Pride" at Harrison.

"Hawk Pride" is a tradition. Our son, Chris, was only four years old when he told us that someday he would be a "Hawk" football player. His sister was cheerleader at the time, and he would attend all the games.

He finally was able to play football with the Farmington Rockets when he was in the 5th grade. It wasn't easy for him, because he was frequently ill with asthma, but he was happy to get his "five plays a game." In his Junior year, he finally was on the Varsity team. He was told to try out for nose guard. So, he worked hard, lifted weights and never gave up.

And guess what? In his senior year he made first string nose guard! He now has two State Championships rings, BOFR of the year award (2000), Spirit Award (2001), All-Division, All-County and many Player of the Game Awards. This is what "Hawk Pride" is all about.

Our son is also captain of the Unified Farmington Lacrosse team, and all the students are from Farmington High, North Farmington and Harrison - but it doesn't matter because they all come together as a unified team.

Also, the bands at the three high schools are excellent and they come together on Tag Days. And Dean Cobb and the students of North have done an excellent job of broadcasting on channel 10, all the events at all of the schools. And aren't we lucky to live in a community that supports an alternative high school?

The school district never gives up on any student. I know that when we read about any school from "our town" (Farmington High, North, Mercy, Alternative, Harrison) we are proud of their accomplishments.

Harrison High School's football program is number one in the state and is also rated nationally, can't the community be proud of every school and every student in our community and quit this bashing! It serves no purpose.

Chris and Maureen Kuclo
Farmington Hills

■ Green-eyed monster

I am so tired of listening to parents whine about "unfair practices." My child is a freshman at Harrison High School and by school of choice.

I watched the varsity football team for the first time play this year. I have lived in this community for 15 years and have read about Harrison's winning record over the years. Considering there have been 12 state championships in the 32 years, there has been only one football coach. He has done his job well. He runs his program like a well oiled machine. They

practice hard when they can be together as a team, and they are educated on how to stay healthy in the off season, as well in good shape. They are well disciplined.

The entire coaching staff is outstanding. Does any one care that they have half of fame coaches on their staff? Not just one but I think as many as five or six. These men work hard at their program.

My father coached football while I was growing up and I know he didn't put that kind of effort into his program. They also didn't win. Anybody that goes to Harrison goes there because they want to, not because they are going to made into a football star. In fact, a majority of the young men that have played for him don't play past high school.

Why can't this city be proud of each and every school's accomplishments? Why is there so much jealousy?

Harrison wins more than football championships. They have won the marching band state championship, marketing competitions, and engineering state championships. High quality program speak for themselves. Harrison has a lot of students and parents willing to work hard to be the best. I believe that the coaching staff could take any group of young men from and make them a good team. Is every group of students and parents willing to make the sacrifices?

These coaches take a group of boys and make them into men who respect their team mates, coaches and other class mates. It is the program that is outstanding, not "recruiting," not "undue influence" that produces winners. Outstanding programs speak for themselves.

The only problem that some people in this town have is a case of the green-eyed monster. (By the way, my daughter doesn't play football.)

Sandra McNeil
Farmington Hills

■ Upset at puppy sales

I am upset that pet stores that sell animals continue to turn a blind eye to the millions of healthy, adoptable animals who are euthanized every year.

Their complicity and advocacy for the purchasing of animals, rather than their adoption, is contributing to the death of more than fifteen million animals in our nation's shelter each year.

Pet stores' actions not only fly in the face of thousands of individuals and humane societies who are working so hard to curb the tragic death of millions of animals, but they also perpetuate the callous cruelty inherent in the puppy mill industry.

I am also appalled at the miserable lives that puppy mill animals are forced to endure. Breeding animals spend their entire lives crammed in small, filthy cages, breeding litter after litter until they are used-up and either killed or sold to research institutions.

The offspring of these poor animals often suffer from severe genetic problems.

It would be very easy for pet stores to change their policies and become truly caring companies by using the store space where they sell animals as adoption centers for local shelters and rescue groups. If they truly care about animals, they will stop contributing to the suffering caused by puppy mills

and the deaths of millions of homeless animals.

I urge everyone to purchase pet supplies only from stores that do not sell animals, and most importantly, always adopt companion animals from shelters rather than purchase them. It is time for the public to understand that for every animal that is bought in a pet store, another is killed in a shelter.

George Sarkisian
Farmington Hills

■ Eyes on the prize

For the past couple months, I have read all the editorials from both sides about the ideals and morals of Harrison and their football team. I must say that it makes me disappointed in the class exhibited by both parties (Farmington parents and Harrison parents).

I firmly believe that an editorial is not the place to discuss the moraliness of Harrison's football team. I'm not sure that people have their eggs in the right basket. We have an A.D. for the School System, his name is Mr. Swinehart. His job is to be sure that the coaches and all their actions are in line. I must say that since he gets paid to investigate things like this, people from both parties have to trust in his decisions and realize that what he says is what goes.

I as a Farmington football player have been through all the hard times of a 9-0 season and I also was able to witness Harrison's victories under the dome in Pontiac. I think that Coach Herrington has something special about his "powerhouse football program" and us at the other side of the city need to respect what Harrison has, and we as Farmington High's football team need to strive for the excellence that Harrison has had in their past seasons.

We as a team need to point our barrels at our desired success not at the envy of Harrison's.

Kyle Washer
Farmington Hills

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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