

Maxfield learns about German education through Fulbright grant

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield returned recently from a prestigious, all-expenses paid two-week Fulbright scholarship trip to Germany.

Impressed by the rich history and culture of the country which for 40 years was behind the Iron Curtain, he visited a number of historic sites, including the Buchenwald concentration/work camp.

"We had gorgeous weather for about a week, and we get to this place and the clouds roll in, there was this wind and driving rain where 60,000 to 80,000 people died," Maxfield said. "They treat it like a memorial."

His group took a tour called "Underground Berlin" into the bomb shelters Hitler built.

In Wittenberg, Maxfield saw the 95 theses of Martin Luther, which shaped the Protestant Reformation opposing the Catholic Church. "We looked at 1,000 years of history which shaped us as Westerners. They are incredibly ashamed of their history of anti-Semitism which led to Adolf Hitler."

Maxfield also detected some negative sentiment toward President George Bush's anticipated war with Iraq and photographed a Mothers Against War demonstration outside his hotel.

"People worked very hard to tell us they didn't agree with our government policy on Iraq," he said. "They don't see the connection with terrorism and Iraq... They fear Americans will lose interest and the Germans will end up being peacekeepers in Iraq."

"They have already deployed hundreds of troops in the Balkans, in Bosnia. They feel a war on Iraq will divert attention away from the war on ter-

rorism."

The group of 15 American superintendents looked at Germany's educational system and the role of government.

"They have more expectations of government, which provides support for the arts and public transportation. One trillion dollars has been spent for reunification since the Wall came down," Maxfield said.

But the trip's real purpose was to talk about education.

"People had carefully chosen our experiences," Maxfield said. "You can't talk about an educational system without talking about the history of the country."

CLASSROOM SIMILARITIES

The German and American school systems have similarities, increasingly looking at results, Maxfield said. "They look at President Bush with admiration with his 'No Child Left Behind.' They don't have much national testing."

The PISA study, sponsored by a federation of educational and governmental organizations, compared European education system with countries around the world.

Germans tested below the United States and many other countries, and weren't happy with what they saw.

Maxfield said the country is wrestling with how much authority state and national government should have. Schools operate more like branches of city government, and German teachers are civil servants.

Starting at fourth or fifth grade, a decision is made about a child's career path. Those perceived by a teacher as being academic are sent to a school called a gymnasium.

Kids seen at the middle level are sent to *realschule*, which is less academic and more prac-

tical.

"By 14, you end up in an apprentice program," Maxfield said. "DaimlerChrysler and Siemens run some wonderful ones."

At the third level, the *hauptschule*, the hope is students can be trained to do something useful for society, Maxfield said. "What you've got is a tracking system which tends to label kids early in life. Early decisions are made which pretty much sets the course of the kid's life. There's very little choice."

"Parents aren't as assertive in Germany," he added.

Secondary schools have few computers and no frills - no media centers, sports teams or choirs. There are no school buses or lunchrooms. "You see kids of all ages on subways and trains by themselves," Maxfield said.

By ninth or 10th grade, students are learning a second foreign language. "If you are in eighth or ninth grade you take your geography class in English," Maxfield said. "If you are a 10th grader you learn European history in English. If you are an 11th grader, you learn biology in English."

Every student learns English, Russian, French and Japanese are also available.

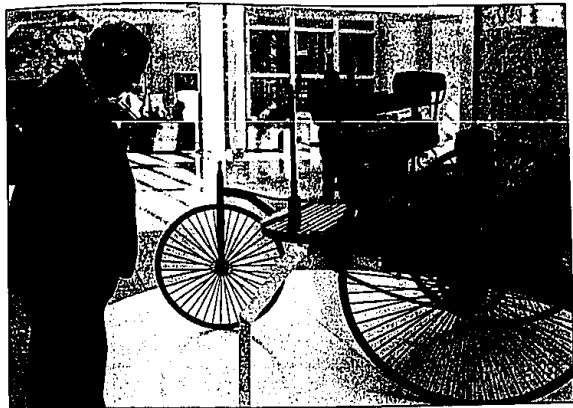
Principals are also classroom teachers, and there's not a big pay differential between administrators and teachers.

Putting aside the tracking issue, Maxfield thinks Germans do a better job of career preparation. German corporations like Siemens and DaimlerChrysler believe it's their job and responsibility to train kids in trades important to their workforce.

"It's a patriotic thing,"

Maxfield said.

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Part of Superintendent Robert Maxfield's Fulbright trip to Germany included learning about the country's history, including this look at an early automobile.

Maxfield observed a number of German mothers protesting actions taken by the U.S. government.



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