



Chat Room

Eleanor Blum

Changes ahead in education scene

Much is happening related to education in Lansing with the State Legislature and our new governor, Jennifer Granholm. How will this affect us in Farmington? After Granholm was elected in November, I spoke with former state Sen. Bill Bullard Jr. He said, "Abolishing the State Board of Education," which he thinks, "is a useless debating society," would be a good idea. However, if that doesn't happen, then the governor ought to appoint the State Board. That's one area of focus in education.

State Superintendent Tom Watkins said, "There needs to be a vote of the people to change the selection of the State Board members."

Whether this will occur in the near future seems doubtful, because Michigan has a budget crisis, which will indeed impact education.

There is a \$1.8 billion shortfall, roughly, for the 2004 budget year beginning Oct. 1. Rick Simonson, an educational consultant in Lansing said, "cuts will be coming. There is a \$280 million dollar deficit now for 2003." How will this impact education? Our Farmington Schools will see the \$6,700 per pupil foundation grant cut by \$44. That means a loss to the schools of \$630,000. This will happen March 1.

State Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi (D-Farmington Hills) said the economy is not turning around that quickly and retail sales are down.

Michigan is realizing less tax revenues, which fund education. Vagnozzi further says school districts will have to use their "rainy day funds."

Many older districts don't have much left.

It looks like school districts will have to lighten their budgets, at least until the business climate turns the corner. Vagnozzi and Watkins both do not believe there will be any tax increases.

State Senate Finance Committee Chairwoman Nancy Cassis, also vice chair of the Education Committee, has looked into her crystal ball and still hopes there will be adequate funding for early reading programs.

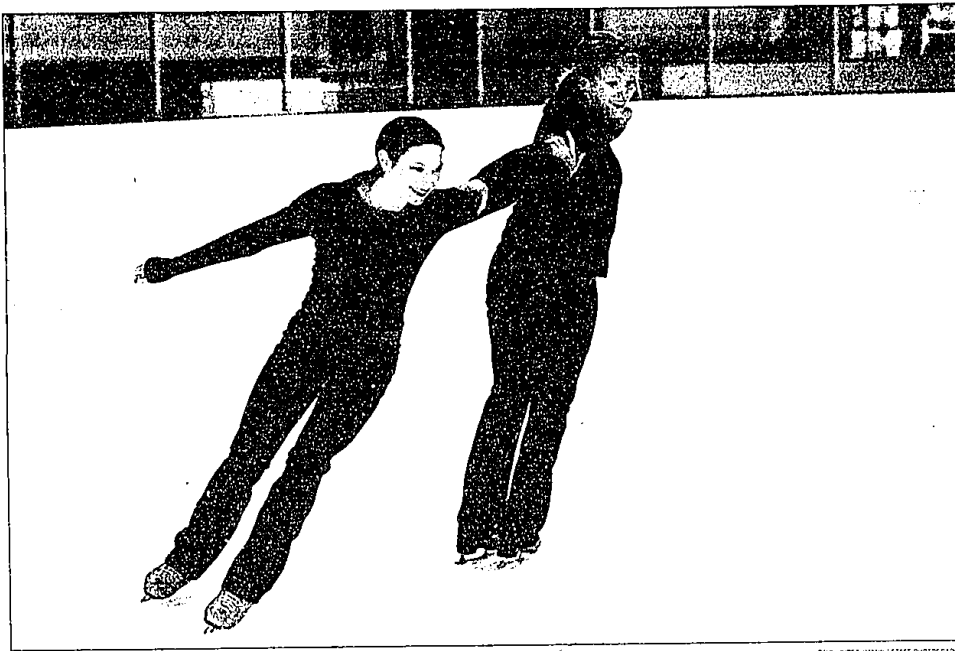
"Children need excellent reading resources and dollars need to be put in reading programs," said Cassis. Charter schools, which are public schools, are needed in some areas where parents require a choice, said Cassis. Watkins concurred.

It would be no surprise if we see more charter schools in the future.

Watkins wants to raise the age at which students can leave school from 16 to 18 years. This would help students who need further motivation and, perhaps, assure them a successful future. It would also put tax dollars into school districts. Youngsters would, hopefully, mature in the two extra years and see the value of an education.

If anyone has a solution to the \$135 million shortfall in state aid for education this year and the \$350-\$400 million shortfall for 2004, Watkins would like to hear from you. E-mail him at michigan.gov/jnde. All ideas are welcome.

Eleanor Blum is a Farmington Hills resident and regular contributor to the Farmington Observer.



Laura Friedman of Canton, left, and Michelle Manery of Plymouth, both 16-year-old Salem High School students and members of the Team Elan Senior synchronized skating team, demonstrate some of their on-ice talents at the Plymouth Cultural Center.

IN Skaters compete for chance at Nationals sync

They came to Italy, they saw the sights and almost conquered the world - the synchronized figure skating world, that is.

Marie Pacini of Farmington Hills is part of Team Elan, a synchronized skating team based out of the Detroit Skating Club in Bloomfield Hills. The 23-person team placed second recently in Milan, Italy, and will compete again soon in Huntsville, Ala., where members hope to qualify for world competition.

Pacini, 17, and a senior at Mercy High School, said coming off competition from Italy was "very exciting."

"We were very close to the first place team from Finland, but unfortunately they won out." She said it was her first international competition.

The skater said she started in figure skating when she was 6 years old.

"My brother played hockey and I saw the other skaters and I just wanted to be like them. I've been doing it every since," she said.

Marie is the daughter of Richard and Christine Pacini.

Laura Friedman, 16, a Salem sophomore of Canton and Michelle Manery, 16, a Salem junior of Plymouth also traveled with the team.

If the skaters place among the top two teams in the National Synchronized Skating Championships in Alabama, they will qualify to compete against other teams from around the world in world championship competition.

Friedman and Manery are part of Team Elan's senior division, which has skaters ranging in age from 15 to 26. Team Elan is based at Bloomfield Hills' Detroit Skating Club.

PLAYING TO THE CROWDS

Friedman said despite the competitive nature of figure skating, having fun is very important.

"I just like showing the crowd a good time and performing to them," Friedman said.

Manery said she appreciates figure skating because of its artistry.

"I enjoy the presentation aspect of skating and the gracefulness of it," she said.

Cheering them on in Milan were Friedman's parents, Pat and Mike, and Manery's parents, Laurie and Kris.

Pat Friedman said that in one way, the parents had more fun in Italy than their daughters.

"We got to see Florence and Venice - the statue of David was unbelievable," she said. Because her daughter was so busy on the ice, she did not get so much of a chance to see the sights.

The skaters both seemed modest when asked how much they want to win in Alabama. But their parents told a different story.

"Her main goal is to make it to the world championships," Manery's

mother said.

Friedman's mother said, "She knows they have a chance to make the top two (in Alabama)."

Their toughest competition will come from the Crystallettes, a Dearborn skating team; the Haydenettes, of Lexington, Mass., and Miami University of Ohio's synchronized team.

'A GRUELING SPORT'

At the helm of Team Elan is coach Jeannine Cullen of Rochester Hills. She said that it's not easy to become a part of Team Elan.

"Even present skaters have to audition for a spot," Cullen said. "It's a pretty grueling sport."

Team Elan members train together up to 12 hours per week, and also train on their own. Off-ice conditioning includes running, weight lifting, aerobic exercise and stretching. They also must maintain training logs.

In the near future, synchronized skaters may be able to go for the gold. Cullen said she hopes one day it is an Olympic sport.

"Right now we are hopeful that it will be included in the 2006 Olympics in Italy," she said.

— Staff writer Paul Pace also contributed to this story

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Story by Heather Needham — Staff Writer

Walsh grad, born deaf, delivers stirring commencement speech

BY PAUL B. PACE
STAFF WRITER

With her hands, Sue Joseph gave the commencement address to her fellow graduates at Walsh College in January.

The Farmington Hills resident, who was born deaf, communicated her thoughts through the voice of fellow graduate, Cathy Stoner.

Joseph grew up in mainstream schools, where deaf students had to learn speech.

"I wasn't allowed to learn sign language because it was believed that when a deaf person doesn't speak, he or she would become helpless," she said.

"But as I learned sign language, it opened up a new world for me, as I connected the finger-spelling into words and the concept of sign language meanings."

After attending a college years ago that had no support system for the deaf, she told her fellow graduates, Walsh College

helped her with her special needs, even offering her a choice of interpreters.

She started classes in summer 2000.

Joseph's classmates treated her "wonderfully." The most difficult part, she said, was "not being able to hear or lip-read and understand more than two people at the same time."

She said other people with disabilities thinking of a higher-education degree should "go for it. Be prepared to work and study harder," she stated, and "be as independent as much as you can."

STANDING OVATION

Rick Bershback, accounting professor at Walsh, taught Joseph in two financial accounting classes.

He noted students gave Joseph a standing ovation after her commencement address.

"I've been going to Walsh graduations for 22 years and that was the first standing ova-

tion," he said.

Through an interpreter, Joseph was able to be like any other member of the classroom, he said.

"It was a wonderful learning experience for us as it was for her," the teacher said.

He said Joseph was a diligent student with a good sense of humor.

"She chose one of the more difficult degrees, a bachelor's in accounting. We admired her acceptance of the challenge. She struggled like most students do at times but she never gave up."

Joseph has three grown children with her husband, Courtney.

She is looking for work in the accounting field and in the meantime is studying for her certification exam.

Joseph has a few tips for people dealing with others who have hearing impairments.

■ When acknowledging a person's deafness, calmly use proper gestures if possible.



Farmington Hills resident Sue Joseph gave the commencement address at Walsh College in January, with the assistance of fellow graduate, Cathy Stoner.

■ In classrooms, do not be afraid to ask or write a deaf person for help with assignments or projects.

■ Involve him or her in your assigned group/team of your study group.

■ In workplaces: "Let a deaf person be a part of your working environment. You will be glad to have him or her to be a member of your team."

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