



OBSERVATION POINT

Detroit Children Cannot Enroll In Suburbs

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

On top of all the trash about cross - district busing, it now looks possible that Detroit's public schools will have to shut down for approximately two months beginning with the Christmas holidays.

Ever since Detroit voters rejected the last attempt to pass school millage last month, Detroit school officials have been threatening to shut the schools down for a while if money cannot be found to finance them. The system is already \$80 million in debt.

Since then, discussion has popped up about Detroit children being sent out to suburban schools during the big intercession to continue their education or, indeed, for the rest of their schooling.

Recently, some Detroit parents made a well - publicized attempt to enroll their children in Dearborn School District, and although no similar attempts have been made with school districts in this area, the possibility remains high. One telephone inquiry has been made to Livonia schools, but no action has been taken in the matter.

VERY LIKELY, it won't be. State guidelines prohibit school districts from accepting for enrollment a child of a non-district resident for educational reasons. Suburban school officials recognize that educational quality in the Detroit schools is lousy already and will be even worse if the two month layoff takes place. But they also know perfectly well that the state's rules make it quite clear that Detroit parents cannot enroll their children in suburban districts just because they want suburban - quality education.

There are some valid reasons, under the state's rules, for school districts accepting for enrollment children whose parents do not live within the district. They include, for example, the case of a high school senior whose parents have moved out of the district but who wishes to graduate from his old school. These reasons, however, do not apply to the case of Detroit parents enrolling their children in suburban districts. And I happen to think that's right and proper.

AFTER ALL, under our present system of school financing, taxpayers in the school district vote the millage to pay for the schools. They elect the school board and, indirectly, hire the superintendent. They have local control over administration and curriculum emphasis. And, most importantly, they get the kind of schooling for their kids that they're willing to pay (i.e., tax themselves) for.

Until we change the system of school financing, that's the logic of our school system, and any attempt by Detroit parents to pull an end run to the suburban schools runs contrary to that logic.

This isn't to say that those Detroit parents who want good schooling for their kids and found themselves in a minority on the recent millage votes don't have darn good reason to be. But under our current system of local property taxes, that's the rule of the game.

ALL OF WHICH leads us back to the basic problem of school financing. Last month, the state's voters

had a chance to restructure the method of financing our schools but turned it down. In the aftermath, there is little chance of the Legislature's acting on its own to revise the method of paying for our schools.

There are, however, two suits -- one in the Michigan Supreme Court and one before the U.S. Supreme Court -- challenging the constitutionality of financing education by the property tax, on grounds of inequality. These suits represent a direct, judicial challenge to the present unfair system; but working them out in the courts will take quite some time.

What probably will happen is that there will be a move to jiggle

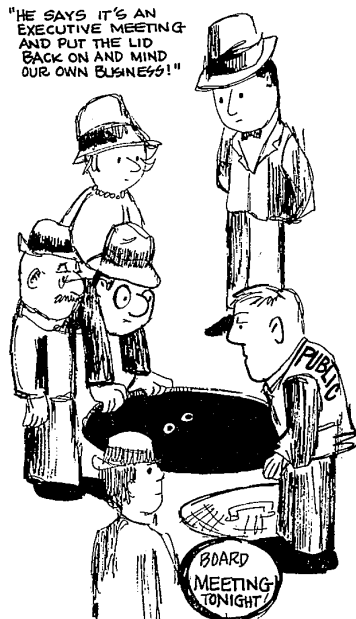
around with the state aid to local district allocation formula, such that districts get a more equal amount of money per student, regardless of how much local millage they have voted.

On balance, this move will hurt suburban school districts, which have high millages and good education quality. It will also make it darn near impossible for any local school district to pass any local millages at all.

In the interim, suburban schools will be hurt, Detroit's problem will not be solved, and a silly school financing system will continue to cause hardship on parents and children alike.

It's one heck of a way to run a railroad.

"HE SAYS IT'S AN EXECUTIVE MEETING AND PUT THE LID BACK ON AND MIND OUR OWN BUSINESS!"



Hockey Treated Well; Now For The Theater

By BETTY MASSON

My enthusiasm for hockey has gone up tremendously since September. The secret lies in the lovely new ice rink our town now boasts.

After many, many years of talking about it.

It is far, far better to watch your sons being banged against the boards in a heated, indoor rink than in the chilling breezes of an outdoor rink. There you are kept too busy jumping up and down or cowering inside waiting for your toes to fall off to really watch the action.

THE SAME THING might work for community theaters and community arts. They need proper facilities.

If projects could be undertaken (and seen) in comfort, there might be a lot more enthusiasm... and better productions.

This past weekend, the Lathrup Players opened "Man of La Mancha" in a high school auditorium and the Wayne-Westland Civic Theater opened "The Fantasticks," also in a high school auditorium.

This weekend, the Livonia-Redford Theater Guild opens "Sweet Charity" in a high school auditorium.

What's wrong with this?

The major difficulty is that usually you don't get the high school auditorium until the night before the performance.

Anyone with any sense would say it couldn't be done. It's like having a couple of kids practice hockey separately and then expect them to perform together

as a team with one team practice before the big game.

Imagine, one evening -- maybe even two -- in which to put together all the pieces, make sure the lighting and sound effects are working and the play will go on as you visualized when you were rehearsing in that small play-house.

The amazing thing is that it is done and done fairly successfully.

BUT IT COULD be better if Observerland had an arts center or two, if the communities of Livonia, Plymouth, Garden City, Westland and Redford Township could get together and support this type of thing.

Farmington and Southfield might also cooperate on one. The Farmington Players have their own barn already and have a wide and devoted circle of fans, but their seating accommodations certainly leave a good deal to be desired, and their staging capacities are limited.

The Farmington Artists Club has a waiting list and can't expand its membership because it lacks facilities.

The Southfield Ballet Company holds rehearsals in a fencing academy. A prominent ballet company is interested in locating in Observerland, if it can find proper facilities.

The Southfield Players perform in the Civic Center Auditorium, which is also used as a gymnasium. Chairs have to be set up for performances.

Smaller groups often have to work in churches, around meetings of other organizations.

IT CAN'T BE done... arts centers cannot be a reality.

Better talk to some of the people involved in theater, a young Livonian, Russ Vogel, for instance.

Nobody told Vogel that at the age of 19 you can't launch your own acting company; get together some 30 kids from Livonia, Westland, Farmington and Plymouth willing to sacrifice two and three nights a week to rehearse in your basement or in a Plymouth church; and turn out productions which would thrill children. So he's doing it.

And doing not half badly when you consider the difficulties... he too only has one evening to put things together on the high school auditorium stage for his productions.

The kids never complained about playing hockey outdoors or having to travel miles in the dawn's early light for practices.

But they look a whole lot better in the new rink.

Can we afford both hockey rinks and arts centers?

With the increase of leisure time, can we not afford them?

Sense And Nonsense

Schoolcraft Community College opened a new program center in Garden City Monday to expand its services to that community.

Garden City residents are at the furthest reaches of the college district, about 30 minutes from the campus on Haggerty near Seven Mile Rd. in Livonia.

Despite the college's efforts to improve its image and relations in Garden City, they goofed when it came to issue a press release on the new center located in Florence Primary School.

The college located the school on Middle Belt SOUTH of Cherry Hill, instead of north of Cherry Hill.

Maybe Garden City officials should provide a map to Schoolcraft leaders when they intend to travel south of Plymouth Rd.

St. Paul's Presbyterian Church of Livonia reports some vandal stole the apostrophe from its sign on Five Mile Road.

"Now what would anyone do with a three-inch cast aluminum apostrophe?" asks the church newsletter, the Spotlight. Good question.

But has anyone thought of investigating that guy in the new car commercial with all the asterisks he can't unload? Maybe he's setting up some new business.

If ever Women's Lib needed a testimonial, it has to be the one of Meyer Leib, president of Sherwood Village Community Assn., in Southfield. Said Leib in an interview:

"I believe in giving everyone a job. Our association is not a one-man operation. I have discovered that if you want a job well done, give it to a woman."

The only question: Does that include the presidency of the subdivision association?

Plymouth's Pioneer Middle School is right on!

In a parent-newsletter the school extends "a hardy welcome to all parents and students for the 1972-73 school year."

Thank you, and we hope the teachers are hardy too.

We'll leave the "hearty" welcomes to the politicians.

3 Easy Lessons In How To Be A Legal Sneak

In Washington they're complaining about a president who only makes announcements and never answers questions about his policies; a president who won't campaign but announces the 20th century's most massive administrative overhaul after the election.

In Lansing they're complaining about the Senate's plan to place newsmen behind a glass cage so that senators can switch their votes suddenly and then sneak out of the chamber before a reporter can ask why.

But they haven't seen anything until they've looked at the tricky ways our grass-roots, good ol' hometown government boards comply with a state law which says all votes must be taken at formal, public meetings. Specifically, they need to study the low-down politics of the Farmington school board, the Redford Union school board and the Canton Township board.

THE FARMINGTON school board has been a bad one for secret meetings for years. Discussions were held in private, and the law was barely complied with by votes being taken at regular meetings.

It seemed that we were in for a breath of fresh wind earlier this year when the board minority persuaded the codgers to open up the "study" sessions to the public. But it was not to be.

President Kenneth Perrin and the majority recently managed to get rid of the superintendent. They didn't do it at a public meeting; they never brought it up at an open study session. Rather, the board set up a third level of meetings on the sly, apparently at members' houses, there to make the most important policy decision any board ever makes -- the hiring or disposal of a superintendent.

After a week and a half (at least) of these sneaky maneuvers, during which the board even hired a special attorney, Supt. Roderick Smith resigned, and the board voted publicly, 4-3, to accept the resignation.

Why? Perrin never had the sense of responsibility or courage to explain. He offered only the blandest phrases about administrative differences and "unity." Perrin and his ilk prefer to operate like oriental potentates, issuing pronouncements from on

high, accepting no public input, operating by stealth.

REDFORD UNION'S school board has managed to operate just barely within the law on a couple of occasions. The most glaring occurred when the board appointed a "general administrator." Here's the clever way they did it:

The board met one Wednesday evening in August to interview final candidates for the job. According to the minutes signed by secretary Gordon Brocklehurst, "After conclusion of the interviews and further consideration and evaluation of the candidates, a special meeting was called."

Note Well: (1) The "consideration and evaluation" were conducted in secret; (2) a special meeting was called on the spot -- at 9:45 at night. It seems these sly foxes found a legal loophole whereby a school board can call a formal meeting without notice on an "off" day at a weird hour if all seven board members are present.

Legal! Yes. Deceptive, morally despicable, sneaky? Yes, yes, yes. But that's small town politics for you.

CANTON TOWNSHIP'S contribution to municipal Machiavellianism is to make its major decisions at special meetings.

The gimmick works like this: The board conducts regular meetings covered by the press corps for routine business. But when a "biggie" -- for example, the budget for the last two years -- comes along, the board sets up a special meeting. Being out in the country, the trustees can post a notice on a door without fear that a reporter will spot it.

It's the best of both worlds: No board member can be put in jail, and the voter never gets treated to the give - and - take of how public policy is made.

Footnote: Every school board and most municipal bodies hold what they describe as "executive" sessions. We have challenged them to state in writing how a legislative body can hold an "executive" session. Several have done it orally, but so far none will put it in writing. The truth is these "executive" sessions are closed-door, secret, sneak sessions from which the public is barred.

Editorial & Opinion

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