

Administrators View Pros And Cons

Schools Are Studying Year-Round Classes

ACT ONE

(The president of Formal Education Inc. sits nervously before his board of directors.)

President: "Gentlemen, I need a new school and a new gymnasium. We're overcrowded."

Directors: "We recognize your problem. But we also know you aren't using your present plans to full capacity. We suggest you put on a second and third shift to accommodate more students."

ACT TWO

(Several parents are waiting outside a school in cars waiting to pick up their children from the four-to-midnight shift.)

First parent: "This is getting to be too much. I'm missing the late show because of this crazy new schedule."

Second parent: "Don't complain... think of the money you're saving."

AN ORSON WELLES fantasy? Maybe. Maybe not.

Most of the recent media publicity has focused on student demands for changes in the schools. But parents are also calling for changes.

Parents more and more are protesting against higher school taxes.

An economy-minded electorate, which functions like a board of directors at each millage vote, is asking for more efficiency and less expansion.

Parents have taken out their frustrations and aggressions by shutting down millage elections this year in the Detroit-area suburbs.

Against this background, school administrators are looking for concessions to appease

the electorate's wrath. Using the present school facilities more often for more students is the first obvious move.

Night classes for first-graders are not yet a very feasible approach. But year-round school sessions, with the year broken up into four quarters, are a possibility.

FARMINGTON ADMINISTRATORS have been studying the 12-month plan for more than a year now. For all of its potential cost-saving advantages, they have found it has one surprising disadvantage: parents don't like it.

"When it comes down to the nitty-gritty of sending their children to school in the summer, an overwhelming per cent of the parents refuse to go along with the 12-month plan," explains Dr. Roderick Smith, school superintendent.

Converting the school calendar into four quarters means each student would attend school three quarters each year. Depending on the luck of a draw, a student might have the winter months off, or the summer three, or the spring for fall.

But parents remain almost unanimously oriented toward summer vacation. "In school districts where this plan was tried, even on a modified basis," adds Smith, "parents simply rebelled."

In all fairness to Farmington parents, they have not yet been put to the test. Nor are they likely to be in the near future.

Year-round schooling has a multitude of other problems which must first be worked out.

COMMUNITY RECREATION would need year-round programs, instead of the present emphasis on summer recreation. "What's a teenage boy going to do if his vacation is in the spring three months?" Smith asks rhetorically. "That's a question the community must answer."

School buildings would need air-conditioning. Few now have it. "Neither teachers nor students can function in a sweltering box," notes Smith. "Any test will prove that."

Renovation and added maintenance costs would thus initially crimp potential savings. Instructional costs would be constant for all year. Actual savings would come from containing 25 per cent more students in the same buildings.

Courses would have to be tightened up. Instead of the usual 16-week semester, quarters would be at 12-week intervals. And the 12-week courses would have to be entities in themselves rather than be continuous through two or three quarters.

Teachers consequently would have to break up their material into more succinct blocks. Some students would argue that this might be an improvement.

Scheduling would become a mammoth task. Computers certainly would have to be used to give each student an entirely new schedule each quarter.

SCHOOLS WOULD HAVE to recruit more male teachers to replace those female teachers who would drop out if faced with a 12-month job.

"Women who are teaching for a second family income do not like the pressure of teaching all year," says Smith. "On the other hand, most men would welcome the added work and pay."

Smith also points out year-round schooling would raise teaching to the level of the medical, law and accounting professions and help school districts in finding more talented college graduates.

With the present surplus in newly-graduating teachers, the 12-month plan might well boost the overall quality of teaching.

JOSEPH NICITA, director of secondary education, has headed the study on the pros and cons of year-round education.

Although many schools across the nation have toyed with the idea, only one is currently using the program.

Some have tried it and discarded it "because the violent community reaction was more than school officials could bear." Others, like Tucson, Arizona, decided it would cost more money instead of saving money and never put it in an experimental stage.

Atlanta, Ga., just started the 12-month school calendar this year. But the prospects for a full summer quarter already appear disillusioning. "They've made the summer quarter voluntary," explains Nicita. "And few families have volunteered for it."

Atlanta officials say they expect the quarters to even out over the next 10 years. But experienced observers are skeptical.

THE MICHIGAN state Legislature has parceled out \$100,000 to six school districts to simply investigate the feasibility of year-round schooling. Farmington did not apply for one of the grants.

Since the new Harrison High School has already been approved, Farmington will not face overwhelmingly jammed classrooms again until the late 1970s. Nearly 6,000 students are now enrolled in Farmington schools. About 600 attend a limited summer program.

Smith says he is trying to improve the offerings of the summer school, adding new math and creative writing to the curricula. Several remedial classes are also taught.

In addition to the \$100,000 in study grants, the state Legislature is paving the way to year-round classes by giving extra aid to schools with summer sessions. A resolution passed early this year puts this into effect for the next fiscal year.

UNDER THE 12-month school calendar more students might accelerate their studies and graduate at age 16 or even earlier.

"This would change the whole American approach to education," Smith says. "But students are more sophisticated and more knowledgeable at a younger age than ever before. There is probably no reason why 16-year-olds can't be in college."

Last year 12 Farmington high school students graduated ahead of their classes, although Smith says the schools still try to discourage it.



CLARENCEVILLE HONOR GRADS — Honored at the 10th annual dinner sponsored by John Anhut of Botsford Inn for Clarenceville High School honor graduates were these students:

(standing from left) Ken Olsen, Norman Shuster, Linda Bornstein, Kerry Rifkin, Drew Clark, Janette LaFevre, Joanne Fell and (sitting) Delores Selman. (Evert photo)



WINNERS — Mrs. C. C. Hamilton (at left) of the Women's Civic Club of Farmington presents the club's annual scholarship checks to Pam LaFevre of Farmington High School, Larry Mahinske of Our Lady of Sorrows and Claudia Thatcher of North Farmington High. (Evert photo)



HONORED — Delta Kappa Gamma, an honor society for teachers and administrators who have made outstanding contributions to their schools, initiated these new members to the Farmington area Beta Eta chapter on May 4. They were (from left) Mrs. Ruth Savage, elementary music consultant; Miss Margaret Cottrell, Eagle School principal; Miss Marylou Seldon, Beechview special education department; and Mrs. Rita Ross of Clarenceville's Botsford School.

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