

Parents press campaign to keep music teacher

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

North Farmington parents and students are continuing their fight to convince school district officials to avoid transferring vocal music teacher Joan MacKenzie to another high school.

"It seems to be apparent that it really isn't a good idea to change her," said parent David Dauterman. "There certainly has to be a way to keep Joan MacKenzie where she is at."

But school officials once again told parents and students their hands are tied and that MacKenzie, the moving force behind the award-winning Northern Lights Choral group, and four other district teachers will be transferred from their existing positions.

Declining enrollment, particularly at the high schools, and the subsequent changes in demand for certain classes are the reasons for the involuntary transfers, according to school administrators.

"Her qualifications are not a matter of debate at all," Superintendent Lew Schulman told parents and students who last week made a last-stand bid to keep MacKenzie at North Farmington High.

"This (the decision to transfer) was not arrived at mechanically or without sensitivity," Schulman continued. "She is not going to be without a job. She is entitled to a full-time job."

"Our decision is based on equity, fairness and consistency. She is not leaving the district. Other students can benefit from her."

"This is a time when I beseech you not to keep on with your perennial protest."

Touting MacKenzie's success with the school's vocal music program and involvement in extracurricular musical competitions, parents and students pleaded with school officials to find a way to keep the teacher at North Farmington high.

IN ADDITION to making their protests at two regular school board meetings, students and parents also distributed letters of protest to the Farmington Observer, school administrators and trustees.

Most of the letters describe MacKenzie's accomplishments and reputation at North Farmington.

"Please reconsider this decision, and know how important it is that Mrs. MacKenzie remain at North Farmington to continue the high quality teaching that has allowed the students, both as a group and as individuals, to perform at such a high caliber," wrote Alice Herman, in her letter to school trustees.

Robert Coleman, district personnel director, explained why the involuntary transfers of MacKenzie and four other teachers must be maintained.

Of the five teachers to be transferred, three are at the high school level, one at the middle school and another at the elementary level.

MacKenzie has been teaching two vocal music classes at North and three classes at Warner Middle School, Coleman said.

Although two classes of vocal music will be offered at North in the fall, other teaching assignment changes would leave MacKenzie with only those two classes to teach, Coleman said.

What is needed at North Farmington next year is someone to teach two vocal music classes and three German classes, Coleman said. While MacKenzie of course could teach the music classes, she is not certified to teach German, he added.

With assignment changes due in the fall, music teachers will each have a school of their own rather than having to be shared between schools, as MacKenzie has been doing, Coleman said.

"Mrs. MacKenzie has the option of selecting one of four middle schools and two high schools," Coleman said in late April.

MACKENZIE AND the other four teachers have their choice of where they wish to be transferred based on their credentials and qualifications, Coleman said.

But parents and students last week continued to protest the administrator's decision to transfer MacKenzie.

At last week's board meeting and in the letters that were distributed, students and parents asked administrators if they would transfer a football coach, especially if he had a winning team.

"We ask ourselves if Joan MacKenzie had been the state champion coach in football, basketball or any athletic event would they have dared to deal with the storm of giving her to another school?" asked Jerry and Penny Trable in their letter to trustees.

School officials told audience members there is a difference between a coach and a vocal music teacher.

"People who coach do not necessarily teach in the schools," said Board President Jack Inch.

If the coach teaches in one of the district's schools there is less of a problem in transferring that person because it doesn't affect the coaching, Inch added.

"Football coaches are not in the same position," he added.

Without giving up, parents and students asked school officials to come up with a "creative" way of keeping MacKenzie at North Farmington high.

"If I thought for a moment you were going to end up with a teacher who is unqualified to teach you, I would raise my voice," said Trustee James Abernethy, in response to parents' concern that the teacher replacing MacKenzie may not be as qualified.

"Will you guarantee an equally qualified teacher?" asked parent Ruth McKinnon.

Schulman responded that the teacher who will be transferred into MacKenzie's position would be "qualified and legally entitled to the job."

Police probe teen 'terrorist activities'

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Some high school students in Troy have taken vandalism and malicious destruction of property to new heights, local police claim.

"There seems to be a real interest in para-military and terrorist activities," said Sgt. Richard Hay, who supervises Troy's juvenile unit.

Vandalism, historically, has been high in Troy, Hay said.

Police say they're now focusing on

several groups — loosely organized, apparently, but some having formal names — which may have been responsible for several rash acts of vandalism since school started last fall.

Those activities include shooting out car windows with pellet guns, knocking over mailboxes and running over lawns with cars.

"Kids sometimes see themselves as oppressed and this is an ideal way to subvert the system or obtain power within the system where no one can

stop them," Hay said while speculating on motives.

FIVE PARA-MILITARY-TYPE groups in Troy, three of which have names — The Jesters of Yort (Troy spelled backwards), Special Operations Group and the TAs — have been identified, Hay said.

"This is a fairly new phenomenon — kids give more or less official names to groups," Hay said.

Police haven't been able to determine monikers for the other two groups.

A clique operating out of Birmingham — Urban Guerrilla Forces — has been a rival of the Jesters of Yort, Hay said. "It wasn't so much a hate rivalry, but a competitive rivalry," he said.

Last fall, youths later linked to the Urban Guerrilla Forces were stopped in

Troy in a modified "war wagon" car containing 60 dozen eggs, Hay said.

Police so far have arrested four Troy residents 17-18 years of age, Hay said. All are high-school seniors. Three have been linked to Jesters of Yort, one to the Special Operation Group.

EACH HAS been charged with malicious destruction of property over \$100 — a five-year felony. Hay declined to name those charged.

Vandalism decreased following those arrests, Hay said.

The Special Operation Group had set up shop in an abandoned house on Long Lake Road, Hay said.

Several copies of Soldier of Fortune magazine, aimed at mercenary participants in military conflicts, were discovered in another "fort" on the east side of town. Police haven't been able

to pin a name on that that group, Hay said.

Some members of such para-military groups have been known to wear camouflage clothing, Hay said.

More than a half-dozen pellet guns have been confiscated from young people in recent months, he added.

WHILE POLICE have no evidence to link members of any organized group to a recent rash of dumpster fires in Troy, the pattern would be indicative of juvenile involvement, Hay said.

Police don't know how many young people may be involved with para-military-type groups in Troy, Hay said, but he doesn't believe it's a large number.

"This is a very small percentage of young people in the city of Troy, but they are responsible for a tremendous amount of damage," he said.

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