

Involving community is high on his agenda

Editor's note: An incomplete version of this story appeared in the Thursday, March 19 issue of the Observer. This is the complete version.

By Casey Hane
staff writer

Michael Duff wanted a challenge. The man who considers himself a "teacher above everything else" found it at Gill Elementary in Farmington Hills: a school filled with a lively bunch, an active parents group and a very special seat to fill.

The new principal at Gill began his job in February, moving from the Willow Run school district, where he served as elementary principal since 1979. He is the first elementary principal to be hired from outside of the Farmington school district since 1984. He replaced Nick Abid who died following an illness in 1986.

"A support base develops over the years," Duff said. "I recognize I have some big shoes to fill. My style is probably very similar to his — I believe in community involvement."

Duff's community involves not only the people living around the school, but staff and students that keep the school functioning daily. Although a district is run with a top level of administration, Duff believes much can be done at a lower level.

"MORE THINGS can happen at the building level," Duff said. "I have an overall commitment to making the school an overall educational environment."

This philosophy was explained further in a February letter sent to parents from Duff, introducing himself and explaining his view of education. "There has to be... a school climate whereby a family feeling is

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— Michael Duff
Gill principal

created among students, teachers and parents," he said. "Parents should feel an openness toward becoming involved in many different aspects of school life. More specifically, I feel all school employees should consider themselves child advocates."

He has another philosophy directed at elementary schools, which he feels are the hub of a community.

"It's important that elementary schools have a mission," he said. "That we work toward keeping the focus... on the kids."

Duff is eyeing some specific areas around Gill as he becomes familiar with the school and community and sets his goals.

"It's really too early for me to outline any definitive plans," he added.

DUFF IS spending his days getting acquainted with students, staff and parents. And he's enforcing some expectations he has in running a good school.

"Parental judgment and good parental support is key," he said. "There has to be a partnership that has to work there."

Duff said he wants to continue the school's "solid" instructional program. He wants to "build upon the

good things going on here." He wants "no change for change's sake."

The supposition has received since arriving in Farmington.

"I have been so impressed with the warmth and acceptance," he said. "It's truly been kind of an uplift. It's been wonderful."

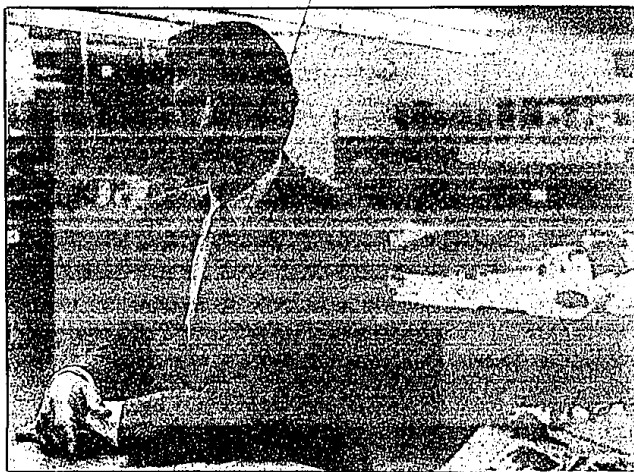
Physically, he would like to see some changes made to the playground area and some additional landscaping and the building. Tile and woodwork in the school's interior is already under way, he said.

AS THE overcrowding issue touches many of the schools in the Farmington district, Duff is watching the growth situation closely. "Space is at a premium," he said, because of the many support programs offered in the district.

"In the near future, we are going to be met with lack of space. I'm prepared to take a close look at it and make recommendations."

His expertise in making such recommendations comes from nearly 20 years of education experience. Duff's career began in Waterford schools, where he taught fourth and fifth graders. His career broadened into community education at both South Lyon and Ypsilanti schools.

He received a two-year Mott Inter-University Clinical Preparation Fellowship through Eastern



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Gill principal Michael Duff, in Ginny Webber's kindergarten class.

Michigan University in 1974-75.

Duff is a member of Optimal International and several educational groups. He holds a bachelor's degree from Oakland University in elementary education, a master's degree from Eastern Michigan University in educational administration and has continued post-master's work through Michigan State University.

Duff is married and has two children; they plan to move back to Oakland County.

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JOAN REYNOLDS
City Clerk

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