

Opinion

33203 Grand River/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

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School outlook

Follow up on year-end report

MORE THAN a year into a new administration, Farmington Public Schools has reached a major crossroads.

As Superintendent Graham Lewis put it in his 1986-7 year-end report: "Old procedures, dated facilities and conventional practices may not bear the weight of an intensively competitive world."

"Times have changed; expectations have changed," Lewis writes. And we wholeheartedly agree.

Not too long ago, headlines pointed to school districts closing underused buildings, school counselors wrestling with falling SAT scores and college recruiters busy trying to attract even borderline students.

Today, many school districts are opening new buildings to meet increased student enrollment. SAT scores are back on the rise nationwide and colleges again have to be more selective on the heels of increased applications.

LEWIS STRUCK paydirt in pointing out that many of the educational reports spawned during the early '80s, led by "A Nation at Risk," merely repeated what we already knew — that some schools had flunked the test of teaching.

Higher instructional standards and tougher graduation requirements almost immediately followed media revelations that many recent high school graduates couldn't read or write.

A new opportunity now exists to react constructively and glean from credible studies what must be accomplished," Lewis writes.

Lewis' 12-page report provides a wealth of facts. But by the time you're done reading it, you're left wanting — wanting to know how the district plans to "react constructively" to "what must be accomplished."

It comes up short in detailing how the administration hopes to "maintain our quality of programs and services." What are the "new expectations with new initiatives" Lewis talks about?

THE REPORT is quick to list accomplishments in the 10,700-student district last year:

- expanded early childhood, community edu-

cation and vocational education programs.

- a streamlined administrative structure linking the primary and secondary instructional programs and improving related planning;
- the earmarking of \$2.5 million for equipment and building improvements;
- a new staff development department to help certified and non-certified employees keep their skills sharp;
- a business-school partnership to give students better insight into the working world;
- the introduction of foreign language in the middle schools.

IMPRESSED? YOU should be. But don't be gushing. Taxpayers should expect nothing less from their school district, one of the state's wealthiest with a \$66.5 million budget.

Did you know the district spends \$5,261 per student each year, 10th highest in the state? Not everything in the district was rosy in the past year.

Some parents angrily opposed an advisory committee proposal to consider moving kindergarten from the elementaries to the early childhood centers.

Other parents chided school leaders for not involving parents more in decision making. A few parents felt the district wasn't doing enough for gifted and talented children.

An immediate need is an advisory committee to study classroom and facility needs. It's no secret at least one new elementary is needed in western Farmington Hills.

WHAT LEWIS' report really needs is a companion follow-up that projects district needs and funding and that offers a wish list for, say, the next 2-4 years.

The superintendent moves into these areas in discussing state plans to equalize school funding and district plans to meet mounting demands on facilities and equipment.

But his report doesn't provide a comprehensive look ahead. This school year — during which kindergartners represent the Class of 2000 — is a natural for unveiling that kind of long-term look.

GOP falters

A narrow focus cheats voters

A **POLITICAL** pundit once observed that all politics are local. Sadly, Michigan voters are being cheated out of that local franchise.

Voters of whatever persuasion should be outraged at the political shenanigans of Michigan's GOP, which is limping into the election of 1988 and crippling the rest of the political process simultaneously.

Forty percent of Michigan's voters are independents. They deserve a choice, a choice that thus far, Michigan's GOP is incapable of offering.

This sorry state exists because a lazy and ineffectual moderate wing fell asleep on the job and woke up faced with a coup d'etat in the ranks. Organizers of this successful coup are supporters of presidential hopeful Pat Robertson.

So torn is the party that it is unable to field a candidate to challenge Democratic Sen. Don Riegle in 1988. When a party's incompetence turns away as qualified a candidate as Colleen Engler, we all are cheated.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, the GOP is so tied up in 1988 presidential politics, it's ignoring a chance to take over the state House of Representatives.

This is nothing short of political nonfeasance on the moderate's part.

Politicians have stopped giggling about the TV preacher's presidential aspirations. He has had great success in South Carolina, Florida and Iowa.

Rivera mural

Cleaning was a labor of love

A **NOTE** OF thanks is due two artists who cleaned the Rivera fresco at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Lucienne Bloch, 78, and Stephen Pope Dimitroff, 77, finished their work on the treasure — a week. Using a simple process — sponge and water — they removed 55 years of grime from the huge fresco, which they know well.

Bloch and Dimitroff worked with Rivera in 1932-33 on the mural, titled "Detroit Industry." In town last week, the husband-wife team told stories of the Mexican painter and his wife, Frida Kahlo.

"Rivera believed the machine controls us, not the other way around," said Dimitroff, a Bulgarian native who worked in a Flint auto factory. Rivera painted Dimitroff on one of the mural's

main panels, as he often used his helpers as models.

Pope and Dimitroff continue to make make frescos and teach students the art of fresco. They had a workshop and lectured on the topic in Detroit.

Decades have not dampened their energy or enthusiasm.

The years have not affected the greatness of "Detroit Industry" either. It is a treasure — now cleaner — and worth another look for those who have seen it before. Those who haven't seen it, should do so. Bloch has seen the fresco hundreds of times. But she said the work remains fresh to her.

"Every day I see something new," she said.

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Michigan GOP opponents are finding out that Robertson is indeed a shrewd political organizer.

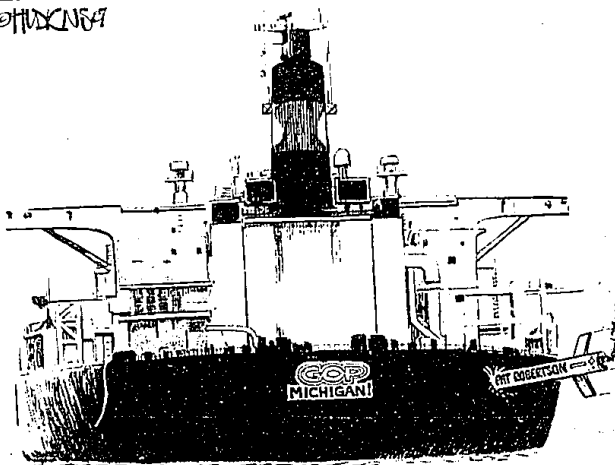
More power to him. By neglecting their duty, the moderates have allowed a group of out-of-state political technicians to grab hold of their party. They are only interested in local politics as long as it serves their candidate's interests.

But when the dust settles, the voters of this state will be left holding a nearly empty, very tattered electoral bag.

There are some problems with the new conservative direction of the state party. Robertson supporters have directed the party on a rightward course beyond the leanings of most Michiganans. The state's Democrats are quietly rubbing their hands in glee.

And while state Democrats are quietly rubbing their hands in glee, we should be shaking our fists in anger.

CHUCK N54



Boards indeed should develop code of ethics

MUCH ADO about nothing? Hardly.

In these times of high-pressure politicking from special interest groups, both the Farmington and Farmington Hills city councils would be wise to adopt a personal code of ethics.

Such a code would give council members a clear-cut set of standards to live by.

The code would provide standards for such key areas as convention travel, expense sheets, conflicts of interest, acceptance of gifts and election practices.

Don't shrug off the need for campaign-related standards.

If Farmington Hills had such standards, the innuendo-packed debates that took up major portions of two recent city council meetings wouldn't have been necessary.

The nine candidates vying for four council seats this fall would have known, up front, it's inappropriate to ask city employees to assist their campaigns by making calls, passing out literature or donating money.

Councilwoman Jean Dudley, seeking re-election, raised the issue of election practices after she was told about at least one candidate who made an employee feel uneasy by asking for campaign help.

DUDLEY PROPOSED that the council adopt a resolution that:



Bob Sklar

- Supports the city manager in his efforts to shield employees from feeling compelled to work on behalf of a particular candidate.
- Pledges to protect the constitutional rights of employees to participate in election campaigns only if they freely choose.

The resolution is basic enough. It wisely doesn't include sanctions imposed by the sitting council, as an earlier proposal did. I don't think it says anything "the city doesn't already do. But it does reinforce the idea that there's no room in this or any city campaign for high-handed election practices.

I think those who opposed the resolution, which isn't law and isn't binding on future councils, missed the point.

The resolution was a symbolic gesture. It was intended to give employees a quick out when approached by a candidate seeking support.

It would have complemented an administrative directive advising that the city manager had an open

door for employees who felt coerced by a candidate.

AS **COUNCILWOMAN** Jan Dolan put it: "We should give all the protection we can to employees of this city. I think they're owed that way out."

Added planning commissioner Paul Blizman: "It may be tough for an employee to say no to someone who is ultimately going to approve salaries or promotions, or change of policy."

When the resolution came to a vote, it barely failed, 4-3. Obviously, at least three council members feel city employees need the reinforcement of support that Dudley's resolution would have extended.

The city charter says council members will deal with employees only through the city manager and will not give orders to employees. But giving orders isn't the same as seeking campaign support, although that's open to interpretation.

Regardless, I don't think the charter is the place to address election practices. A code of ethics is.

Granted, the incident that spurred Dudley's resolution appears to be isolated. But isolated incidents have the potential to snowball.

So it would behoove each of this community's city councils to develop a no-nonsense code of ethics that, for starters, covers election practices.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Heritage story greatly helped

To the editor:
Our Farmington/Farmington Hills heritage celebration/home tour is over. We had good weather and good crowds — over 300 during the two days.

A good part of that success is dependent upon one fine article you prepared.

Thank you for your help,
Steve Olson
tour coordinator

Residents are a key to parks

To the editor:
The citizens of Oakland County deserve the fine editorial you recently wrote about our "model parks."

Thanks to their participation at the parks, support of millage, and commitment to quality of life programs, our parks are flourishing. Am outstanding parks staff serves the public.

On behalf of the private non-profit Oakland Parks Foundation, we thank our growing number of friends for their special support. Our board, under the leadership of George Gogolian, has been truly dedicated.

Thanks to the generosity of individuals, corporations and founda-

tions, during the past three years, we have been able to raise over \$160,000 for the Irwin and Sadie Cohn Amphitheater for year-round use, a nature trail for blind and handicapped, summer day camps for disadvantaged youth, and special nature programs for seniors.

The Oakland Parks Foundation is looking forward to a continuing relationship with the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission to help enhance the quality of life for residents in all areas of Oakland County. Our next major project will be assisting the commission in raising funds to develop Orion Oak County Park in Orion Township.

We appreciate the continuing private and public support of the citizens of the metropolitan area.

Frances S. Greenebaum,
executive director
Oakland Parks Foundation

Reader lauds pope coverage

To the editor:
I have to thank the Observer & Eccentric for the colored prints and positive coverage of Pope John Paul II's visit.

It's great to have one's hometown paper respond so well.

The column by Rich Perlberg in the Sept. 24 edition was especially noteworthy.

Jo Ann Sergott
Livonia

Hate: It's a real curse

To the editor:
Substance! Here's some substance.

Mr. Sklar (Opinion page, Sept. 3). The 13th line of the Ten Commandments states: Thou Shalt Not Kill. The law of the land forbids murder. Yet we constantly witness violent acts against each other. We mourn the victims as we bury them. Newspapers and magazines are lined with murders, child abuse, rape, greed, corruption, lies and all the evils known to mankind. The common denominator is hate.

Columnists write their comments in editorials, but no real solutions. Politicians promise more laws.

Yet more will die from a gun as the debate goes on. A mother cries because her daughter fell to a killer's bullet.

Hate is everywhere. The ugly seed has been planted. Its blossoms are all its relatives. To kill this weed, we need a cleansing of our whole society.

Hate affects all of us. We don't need more words. We need action. This is something that lives everywhere. We must push love and understanding.

We must learn to act as brothers and sisters, or we will all perish because of this sickness called hate.

Vernon C. Kleplinski
Farmington Hills

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