



# 11,000 reasons make safety the 1st lesson

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

**F**ARMINGTON transportation officials have learned their lesson when it comes to school bus safety.

Whether it's installing "banana" mirrors to alleviate blind spots for drivers, ordering new buses with escape hatches in roofs, adding safety cages to gasoline tanks or handling routine maintenance, they focus on getting the district's 11,000 students to school and home safely each day.

"We try and stay ahead of things," said the district's purchasing director, Beverly Hausman, who also oversees operations at the district bus garage. "We get a lot of journals with information on safety items."

Hausman said she also relies heavily on supervisors in the transportation department to bring safety items to her attention.

School bus safety has come to the forefront in recent years as a nation focused on several major accidents, including a fatal one in Kentucky last summer that involved a fire on a private school bus.

In Oakland County, there hasn't been a school bus-related death in about 10 years, according to county figures, although there have been others across the state.

Michigan State Police records show there is an average of five deaths per school year involving school buses. Most involve a 5- to 6-year-old child who drops something under or near the bus and tries to retrieve it.

STEVE COULTER, a representa-

tive of Hockstra Truck Equipment in Grand Rapids, sells buses to many school districts in Oakland and Wayne counties. He believes Oakland County is in the forefront in looking at safety features for buses.

"Oakland County would have to be considered a leader in the state of Michigan," he said. "That's not to say the others aren't safety conscious — they are. For many, it's a matter of money."

Farmington alleviates potential problems in this district by taking precautions, working on staff training, ordering new safety items on buses and adding them to the current fleet when possible.

For example, nine new buses were just ordered for the 1989-90 school year, which will have seat covers with a fiberglass backing for better fire protection, and hatches in bus roofs, which should help ventilate and can be used for emergency escapes.

A newly ordered bus for students with orthopedic handicaps will face wheelchairs forward — something Hausman said she expected to be a mandate from the state in future years.

AND THE current fleet has a radio in every bus. Last year, new "banana" mirrors were added to eliminate blind spots for drivers.

Floyd Smith of Oakland Intermediate Schools said Farmington was the first district in the county to fully outfit its buses with these mirrors, and was the test district for a mirror program.

Hausman admits the Farmington district is fortunate to have the mon-



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Ken Lusark (left), school bus garage mechanic, and Malen Terry, vehicle maintenance supervisor, check the operation of an escape hatch. The hatch is designed for quick evacuation of chil-

dren when the bus is tipped or upright. It also can be lifted to provide interior ventilation.

ey to keep its buses safe. "The district is very supportive budgetwise," she said. "Anything we can do to make our equipment more safe, we do."

But there are other things being done in the Farmington district which go beyond the budget.

Transportation staffers went through a half-day of in-service training in first aid.

Five to six school bus drivers sit on a Transportation Safety Committee that recommends changes in policy and operations, based on drivers' experiences on the road.

HAUSMAN SAID she gets about five suggestions per week from this

group, which was formally organized last year.

"The drivers are very concerned about safety issues," she added. "It's working well. They're out there and see what's going on."

Drivers put their students, at all grade levels, through evacuation drills. Kindergarten and new elementary students now go through a safety assembly put on by AAA of Michigan, where safety measures, emergency evacuations and basic information about bus safety are discussed.

"It's not just having the money," said OISD's Smith. "It's having the people to pursue these management control items that reduce risks for youngsters. When you put a team

like (Farmington's) together, then you've got a tremendous resource."

"There's just an outstanding spirit by that group."

School districts aren't the only ones concerned with safety issues.

A PARENT group called Buses United for Safety was formed in 1984 after a 6-year-old Fenton boy was killed as he strayed in front of his school bus into his driver's blind spot. BUS was started by a mother of two, a member of the jury panel that acquitted the bus driver in the young boy's case. The driver had been charged with negligent homicide.

Parents in the Farmington district have also watched bus transporta-

tion with interest recently, even though there have been no fatalities. Students who live on the district's growing west side have had to spend an hour or more on the bus each way to get to school.

Throughout the country, including Oakland County, one of the most discussed safety issues has been that of seat belts in school buses.

Although required in some states, Michigan school officials have shied away from their use. "We would not add seat belts unless we were told to (by the state) because we don't feel they're safe," said Hausman.

The padded, high seats that are placed close together give enough safety to the young riders, she said.

## inkwell

Inkwell provides news about Farmington-area primary and secondary students and education issues. The column appears monthly as part of the Observer's "School Page." Send news items to: The School Page, Farmington Observer, 3303 Grand River, Farmington 48034. Include a telephone number where a contact person can be reached during the day.

### NUMBERS UP

Numbers of elementary students have increased from 3,873 to 4,877 "almost overnight," says Farmington's deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan in the district's most recent newsletter "Update."

Because of the increases, the district is asking voters for \$7.3 million in a special election Jan. 31 to build a new elementary school.

The election will be a second effort, after a millage election which asked for a new elementary, plus other building improvements, was defeated in September.

### SNOW DAYS

Now that winter is here, Farmington school officials are asking parents to stay tuned to local radio stations for information on "snow days," when school might be called off.

"Parents and children are requested not to call radio or TV stations, the police, or school officials," information from the district said.

"You can help by keeping telephone lines open and relying upon broadcast information."

### SHE'S OUTSTANDING

Amiee Cox, a junior at Farmington Hills Mercy High School, was one of 350 students from across the country chosen to participate in the 1988 National Young Leaders Conference.

The 16-year-old Farmington Hills resident was selected a Congressional Scholar based on academic achievement, leadership and citizenship.

Cox currently maintains a 3.8 grade point average, is enrolled in honors courses, is involved in school sports and works at Bill Knapp's Restaurant.

### PARENT PROGRAM

A parenting program based on Ru-

dolph Driekurs' "Children the Challenge" class is being held this fall on Wednesday mornings at Fairview Early Childhood Center, with co-leaders Suzanne Unger, a school psychologist, and Susan Anker, a school social worker.

Beginning in January, the Farmington Public Schools program will move to Alameda for a Tuesday morning class.

### 5 INDUCTED

Five Brother Rice High School students, all residents of Farmington Hills, were inducted into the National Honor Society, Aquinas Chapter, Nov. 20.

The students were voted upon by the entire faculty and staff of the Farmington high school for meeting high standards of scholarship, service, leadership and character.

The new members include Derek Novara, John Cowan, Andre Harganani, Christina Maza and Scott Mayotte. They are part of a group of 37 inducted Nov. 20. They join the 63-member chapter at Brother Rice.

### DANCE PLANS

The Student Round Table, a student body that represents each of the three public high schools in Farmington, is eyeing plans for a district-wide, tri-school dance for next spring.

The dance would be the Round Table's big project of the year, and might possibly be held off-site at Oakland Community College, or at another location.

### MINI-GRANTS

Extra money has been set aside for schools in Farmington that want to set up "Effective Schools" model programs.

According to information from the superintendent's office, staffs at several schools have shown an interest, including Larkshire Elementary, Wood Creek Elementary, Wooddale Elementary and Cloverdale Training Center. Those beginning the improvement program will receive a mini-grant as incentive.

"I am looking forward to adding more schools to the roster this year," said superintendent Graham Lewis. "The goal is to have every school participating over the next two years."

Both Farmington High School and Oak Hills Elementary School have had Effective Schools programs in place during the past year. The program is a grass-roots effort started by staffs internally at the schools, and in-

volves a self-evaluation and plan of action.

### DONATIONS NOTED

The American Yazaki Corp. has given the Farmington Public Schools a check for \$1,000 in appreciation for the work the district has done with its Japanese students.

The check was given by Masayuki Yamamoto, president of the Japanese Society of Detroit, and a colleague from the company.

Also, as in years past, the American Association of University Women-Farmington Chapter, has donated \$200 to the district in appreciation for allowing them to use space to store books for their annual book sale.

### COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Farmington educators are being encouraged to use a teaching model that will encourage students to learn the value of teamwork.

The Cooperative Learning Training Program has been offered to teachers during the past two years through the Staff Development Department. Trustees recently saw and heard an overview of the program, which detailed the basis for the program, teacher training requirements, and showed a videotape of how the program is being used in the district.

### WILD KINGDOM

Students at Longacre Elementary greeted a group from the Living Science Foundation of Novi with open arms this fall. Each classroom participated in the visit, in which live animals are brought to the schools for some "hands-on" teaching.

"Sparky Amazon," an Amazon porcupine adopted through Living Science by the Longacre students, came to visit. Sparky's adoption papers are on display in the Farmington school's front office, with pictures of principal Millie Bennett holding the new school mascot.

### FAMILIES SOUGHT

International Student Exchange is seeking families to host students from Mexico, Japan, Colombia, Spain, Germany, Panama, Brazil, Bolivia and Egypt.

The teenagers live as a member of a local family while he or she attends the local high school. Excellent students, they are carefully screened, covered by medical insurance and provide their own spending money.

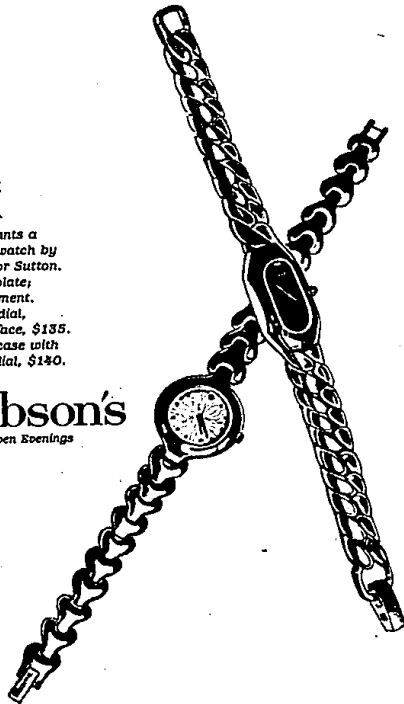
If interested in hosting a student, contact the International Student Exchange at 1-800-333-HOST.

## SMART CHOICES



She really wants a chain metal watch by Anne Klein for Sutton. Gold electroplate, quartz movement. Left: Round dial, champagne face, \$135. Right: Oval case with sleek black dial, \$140.

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