

Schools weigh religious education policy

By Darrell Clem
staff writer

A proposed policy to clearly define the Walled Lake School District's stance on religion in education is under consideration by the school board.

The district includes northwest Farmington Hills. The policy, drafted by a committee of teachers and school administrators, recognizes religious freedom as a "fundamental right" and is rooted in the American constitutional system.

Yet, citing the separation of church and state, the policy prohibits school sponsorship of a specific religion. "No matter how well intended, official or unofficial sponsorship of a specific religion by the school is in direct conflict with the principle of that separation," it said.

THE POLICY is aimed at setting clear guidelines because of changing demographics, said Carl Pacacha, assistant superintendent for secondary education.

"We're seeing a number of people from various races, religions and

cultural backgrounds," Pacacha said. The proposed policy does not stem from any particular religious-related incident or complaint in the school district, said Lois Lange, assistant superintendent of public relations.

Pacacha said the school board is expected to vote on the religion policy this fall. "We're hoping to have something approved before the holiday season."

THE PROPOSED policy states the district "will not permit the pro-

motion of any religious belief, doctrine, creed or practice in the public schools as part of its curriculum or co-curricular activities.

"Factual information and objective teaching about religions, including the principles of religious freedom and religious liberty and the role of religion in history and society, will be a permitted part" of the curriculum.

Among the highlights of the policy: Students cannot be penalized for absences on religious holidays.

School programs and meetings are to be scheduled as far in advance

as possible so they will not conflict with religious holidays.

Apart from factual, objective information, "religious symbols will not be displayed in public school buildings."

Religious practices, prayer, celebration or observation — unless part of a planned curriculum — would be prohibited at school-sponsored events.

The study of religious art, drama, literature and music would be encouraged in such subjects as fine arts, the humanities and history. But all religious performances and dis-

plays would have to be "consistent with district policy and have approval of the principal at least 10 days prior to the presentation." Moreover, student participation in religious performances would be optional.

The committee that drafted the policy recommended that the district help students learn "the fundamental differences that exist among people of different cultures and religions" as well as "the fundamental unity of all human beings."

If the school board approves the policy, it would take effect immediately, Pacacha said.

Controversial artwork gets official OK

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SILVERMAN, a Southfield resident who works as a civil engineer, is on the board of governors at the Cranbrook Academy of Art and the board of trustees of the Detroit Institute of Arts. He bought the artwork at the 1972 biennial art exhibit at the Whitney Museum in New York City. The piece was in the main sculpture group, he said.

In addition to the Whitney, the white-painted, aluminum artwork has been exhibited outdoors at the Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, New York City, and the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, and indoors at the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills.

"I'm delighted," Silverman said Monday. "The city of Farmington Hills is very courageous to enact an enabling ordinance. I'm pleased that I'm fighting for artists."

Silverman said Hall, a Bloomfield Hills resident and head of the Cranbrook Academy of Art's sculpture department, "couldn't believe" the controversy. "Nobody here (in the Kaufman & Payton Law Offices building) disliked it," said Silverman, who is a tenant.

AS A result of a complaint in April 1988 by a Farmington Hills resident who city planning and zoning will

not name, the sculpture became the subject of a year-long community discussion and argument.

In 1988, the zoning board of appeals denied Silverman a variance for "Covington" on the lawn in front of the building because the city has no provision in its building codes for a work of art.

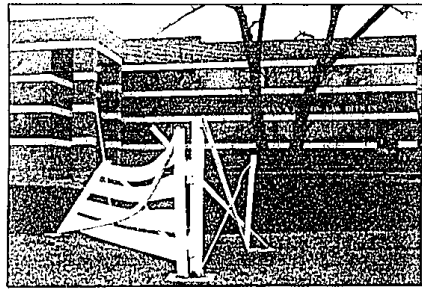
Despite strong criticisms, the Farmington Hills City Council enacted a controversial artwork ordinance 5-2 in April. Council members Jean Fox and Paul Sowerby, who opposed any attempt to regulate art, opposed the ordinance.

The ordinance allows "one statue, sculpture or similar structure" in front yards of non-single-family residential property following review of plans and the structure by the planning commission.

The artwork is required to pass muster with the Farmington Area Arts Commission. In July, the arts commission designated "Covington" a "legitimate and acceptable" artwork.

"In any community, you will have dissenters and promoters of art," said Bev Ellis, who chairs the nine-member appointed arts commission. "Anything positive that will promote the arts is a plus."

IN ADDITION to the arts commission's recommendation, the sculpture or structure can't be in the right



RANDY DONST/staff photographer

Architect Kenneth Newmann and sculptor Michael Hall carefully positioned "Covington" in front of the Kaufman & Payton Law offices and a shallow stream with weeping willows.

of way; be a sign or commercial message; pose a danger to public health, safety and welfare; exceed health requirements; or demean or degrade any racial, religious, ethnic or gender group.

The book, "Art in Public Places" by Dennis Alan Nawrocki (1989), describes "Covington": "Covington is

one of a series of gates or fence-like constructions named after small towns which Hall began in 1969. Forms reflect the rural Midwestern landscapes with their gates, fences, pipelines and billboards."

The artwork represents isolation and abandonment romanticism.

Rape suspect charged

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Investigative work is continuing, including processing of physical evidence at the police lab.

The 29-year-old victim was attacked between 11:30 p.m. and midnight Sept. 20 by a man who broke in, claiming to be a maintenance worker. It is believed the

man entered the apartment through a bedroom window.

According to information from police, the man confronted the victim, first asking to see her former roommate, then telling her he was a maintenance worker. He then sexually assaulted her. She was treated at Botsford General Hospital and released.

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