

Pilot school gets high marks from parents

By Casey Hans
Staff writer

Results of a survey released last week show Highmeadow Common Campus parents give the Farmington Hills pilot elementary school good marks in nearly every category.

"What you have here is a group of folks tickled pink with the program," said Oakland Schools consultant Ernest Bauer, who is working with the evaluation committee and who compiled and analyzed the survey results.

"I think the parents did read the survey and responded in ways that were appropriate in every respect," Bauer offered detailed numbers

and categories, but did include a margin for error in his survey. There was not a clear cutoff date on accepting responses to the survey; the deadline was extended to allow further responses, which could skew results.

The survey is part of an evaluation of Highmeadow Common Campus, which opened in the fall of 1988. The school offers not only a core curriculum but also enrichment and advanced courses.

Students in grades one through five from throughout the district were selected by lottery to attend the school. The school was designed to offer new programs and to ease overcrowding in the district.

THE SURVEY'S PURPOSE is two-fold: To guide Farmington School District officials as they look at the program's future and to determine how the Highmeadow population will be handled in an ongoing elementary school boundary study.

Judith White, the assistant superintendent coordinating the evaluation, called the survey "an exceptional report for Farmington, because schools across the nation are not getting such a good report card."

Some Farmington school trustees said the active Highmeadow parent population and overall excitement over the new program might skew the figures. But they nonetheless were pleased with the response and the numbers.

Most concerned that the pilot program would continue through June, when the district will decide its fate.

Direct parent involvement has to affect the figures, said trustee James Abernethy. "There has to be a plus. That item is part of the reason for the success of the rest of the program."

"There's an element of newness and excitement there that shows here. It would be nice if that could go on forever."

"MY CONCERN is, how do we maintain the delirium?" asked trustee Janice Rolnick, who said she supports moving ahead with program in future years.

Each household with children at Highmeadow in grades two through five were sent surveys, with 174, or 66 percent, of the households returning the questionnaire. With the exception of one question involving special education needs, 90 percent or more of the questions had positive re-

sponses by 90 percent or more of the parents.

Also surveyed was 12 percent of the households with children in other elementary schools to determine the quality of the overall elementary program; about half of these, or 8 percent of the total population, participated. They were slightly less enthusiastic, with most of the answers having 80 percent or more positive responses. A major concern by this group of parents was the lack of opportunity for their children to learn from those at other age levels.

THE SURVEY is the first part of the Highmeadow evaluation project, which will continue throughout the school year — the second year of a one-year pilot. Using 44 questions, the survey attempted to address seven key areas: academic program,

curriculum, instruction, parent participation, special student populations, student attitudes, social environment and total elementary program.

Trustee Jack Inch became agitated at Bauer's apparent inability to explain and analyze the numbers in the survey further. Bauer had compared the results of the two sample groups of parents without explanation as to the significance of each. One Highmeadow parent said he would "caution interpreting the results further." He added that only two things guarantee success: parental involvement and the attitude of teachers.

Based on discussion last week, it appears the elementary boundary study committee will be directed to consider Highmeadow a successful program when considering various school attendance areas.

Gifted education forums set

A committee studying gifted education in Farmington Public Schools is seeking community ideas for the direction of the program.

A 38-member committee has been appointed to gather information and study gifted education issues. The group is scheduled to make presentation and recommendation for any changes to the school board Feb. 6.

Public meetings on gifted issues are scheduled for:

- Elementary school level: 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 7, at East Middle School, Middlebelt, north of 10 Mile.
- Secondary level (middle and

high schools): 7-9 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 9, at East Middle School.

• Overall meeting for both levels: 1-3 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 28 at Lewis Schulman Administrative Center, 32500 Shawwassee.

The group is studying issues such as general curriculum, counseling, extracurricular options, advanced language arts at middle school level, gifted pullout program in the elementary schools, and advanced classes at the high schools. Staffing,

facilities and other gifted-related ideas also will be considered.

The study committee has representatives from the school board, administration, curriculum coordinators, teachers, gifted coordinators, parents and students.

The committee is chaired by gifted coordinator Barbara Rebbeck and parent Bob Kopelko.

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