

District to look at plan for year-round school

By Casey Hane
staff writer

Farmington school trustees are cautiously optimistic about a proposal for a voluntary year-round school program, which officials feel could offer another choice for students and parents.

They like the idea well enough to ask superintendent Michael Flanagan to bring a detailed plan for such a program, including specific costs, before the board this year.

"I've always been a proponent of a year-round program," said Flanagan, who experienced one of the area's first year-round programs as an administrator with the Huron Valley schools. "But the only reason to support it... is for the educational rea-

sons. If we're able to save space in buildings, that's just gravy."

In a year-round program, the school year would still be comprised of 180 days, but students would attend school throughout the year and get breaks four times per year.

Although most trustees spoke in favor of such a program, concerns were raised about financing it and looking seriously at similar programs that failed.

BEFORE MAKING a firm decision, Helen Ditzhary said she wanted more information on year-round school programs in Northville and Plymouth, which failed. James Abernethy said he was "excited about the possibilities," but that because of the financial concerns facing the district he

said "I won't write a blank check." Board President Susan Rennels said she wanted details on the project before making any final decisions.

Fred Forsythe, a consultant and retired elementary principal from Huron Valley Schools who has been involved with year-round schools for 18 years, worked with the study committee. He said there are currently 20 states and 500 districts across the country offering year-round school programs, and that year-round school keeps students and teachers motivated. One of the disadvantages is potential vacation conflicts with families who have children in both traditional and year-round schools.

The idea for a year-round school program in Farmington developed from a fall study

of building usage, in which the year-round concept was studied. In September, school board members authorized another committee to continue studying the possibility.

"I hope we do pursue it quickly," said board member Helen Prutow. "I think it's marvelous." Trustee Jack Cotton concurred. "I think it's terrific — the sooner the better," he said.

Sue Shapiro, a parent who served on the year-round education study committee, said many parents are excited about having such a program. "I like it because we're not putting a (an enrollment) ceiling on it, like we did at Highmeadow," she said.

Parents and school officials compared the program to Highmeadow Common Campus, an alternative elementary pro-

gram that has students from around the district and offers different curriculum choices. But that program has been limited in numbers, and the district held a lottery to fill student slots.

Flanagan said, in this case, the district would survey parents to see who was interested, then shape a year-round program from there. There could potentially be more than one school involved, he said.

At least one resident shared Abernethy's concerns over such a program's cost. Joe Svok said he liked the idea, "but when you start looking at the budget, there's going to be some real concerns." He speculated the change could cause "some resistance" if other programs had to be cut.

Candidates agree on certain issues

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Despite the state Legislature's efforts to pass right-to-die bills, the hurdle also comes in fetal rights provisions.

Brickner said that perhaps the state Legislature should at least address the right-to-die for the sick and elderly and then work on the

fetal rights issue. "I'm in favor of people having self-determination. We are one of the few states that doesn't have the right-to-die legislation," he said.

Dolan is fed up with the lack of action on right-to-die legislation. "If we can't get it through, I would like to promote a petition drive. I think a lot of people are concerned about this. It's an option."

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