

Students turn the TV dial to Channel 1

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Next year, hundreds of West Bloomfield students may be exposed to a television message as part of their regular school routine.

The message, about 12 minutes, will focus on current events featuring young television reporters, teenage versions of Arthur Kent or Peter Jennings.

The message will also include a brief segment, about three minutes, of television commercials — only the captive young audience won't be able to escape by going to the kitchen for a snack. It's all part of a pilot program approved by the West Bloomfield

Board of Education. By a 4-to-2 vote Monday, the board approved a pilot program commonly known as Channel One.

Channel One calls for Wittle Communications, with studios in Los Angeles, to install television sets in half the classrooms at Abbott and Orchard Lake middle schools. The company pays for the wiring and installation as well as the television sets.

The schools can keep the television sets, free of charge, as long as 12 minutes of Channel One broadcasting — complete with commercials — is shown in the classrooms daily.

"This is a good opportunity for

the district," said Jeffrey Stewart, vice president of the board and one of four trustees who supported the pilot program.

Voting against the pilot program were board members Sharon Lipton and Edwin Basile.

The schools must broadcast Wittle's programming for 12 minutes daily. But throughout the rest of the day the television system can be used as administrators see fit. "It (the program) opens numerous possibilities," Stewart said.

Stewart estimates the cost of the pilot program at about \$23,000. The cost of expanding Channel 1 district wide would be

between \$80,000 and \$100,000.

The proposal from Wittle Communications has been under consideration for almost a year. Some people think the programming is biased or incomplete, said Stewart. Others think it is no more biased or incomplete than the programming from the major networks, including CNN, or the coverage provided by newspapers or news magazines.

Any classroom discussion must be monitored by teachers, Stewart said. "If the coverage is biased or incomplete, the teacher can point that out and bring some balance."

As for the commercials, Stewart said they are typical of those seen on regular television networks.

"They promote shoes, snacks and other items" in which a teenage audience might be expected to be interested, he said.

Channel One broadcasting has only recently been available to Oakland County schools, according to the intermediate school district.

Although many school districts have television in the classrooms, only a handful of Oakland County districts participate in Channel One. They include Pontiac, Oak Park, Brandon, Oxford, Waterford and Clarkston.

But the Channel One system has already triggered extensive discussion.

There's considerable debate on

whether public schools should be part of allowing commercial messages into the classroom, according to David Harris, social studies education consultant for Oakland Intermediate Schools.

Channel One began a pilot test program in six schools around the country in May 1989. Within the first five months, 2,900 schools in 34 states agreed to participate in the program, according to company figures.

As of last July, more than 11,861 secondary schools, with enrollment of more than 8 million students, had signed up for Channel One broadcasting, the company said.

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