

POINTS OF VIEW

Chance to just say 'no' appeals to taxpayers

Question: As a committed teacher for more than 20 years, it seems like we are getting bashed by some of our public. Millages are going down, while teacher strikes are seen as holding a hammer over the heads of residents. Are we educators losing the confidence of the public? What are your thoughts about millage issues and teacher strikes in today's environment?

Answer: Let's look at the issues individually!

Millage, bond issues

This is the only voting opportunity in which citizens can go into a booth, close the curtain and say no. It has to be a great feeling for some residents frustrated with rising costs in all areas — food, clothing, cars — to say no to a tax increase.

Name one opportunity, other than a school millage or bond issue, in which a resident can say no to a cost increase. There are none! All other cost increases in our country are determined by company boards of directors or through our political representatives.

Recently, at a backyard party with some auto executives (some driving

\$40,000 cars), whose kids are now out of school, a recent millage issue in my community came up. They made it clear they were tired of paying school taxes and therefore voted no on the June 1993 school millage. Their kids' education was paid for by other taxpayers over the years.

I asked the execs why I didn't get an opportunity to vote yes or no on that \$400 window-slicker price increase on the car I wanted to buy. They laughed and thought I was joking! I said, "I don't think it's funny. As you have a right to vote on a school cost increase, I want the right to vote on a car cost increase. I want my right to say no."

Their answer was, "Car costs go up every year." My response was, "Do you think educational costs go down every year?"

Indeed, a school millage is the only opportunity for frustrated residents to say no to a cost increase. And, in fairness, some simply can't afford a higher millage!

Teacher strikes

Teacher strikes this fall will gain about as much sympathy as Israel and our country have for Saddam Hussein. With IBM laying off another 50,000, plants and air bases closing,



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and college graduates with no jobs, these situations indicate to me (a former president of the Plymouth Education Association) that a teacher strike

this fall will accomplish nothing more than driving away residents who might otherwise have been swing votes in future millage elections.

One supportive parent (whose pay has been frozen for two years) told me "they (teachers) can walk 'til they wear their legs off at the knees . . . as far as I'm concerned."

Michigan Education Association

The MEA has done wonders for teachers over the years, and I benefited from their efforts. In these tough times, members of the MEA and the MEA leadership will show their "colors."

If it comes down to increasing elementary student class sizes from, for example, 24 to 33 children, or taking a pay freeze, I would assume the MEA and teachers, who supposedly got into the profession to help children, would take a minimum increase or a pay freeze.

A teacher pay freeze, of course, would mean that the superintendent and other administrators would also take a pay freeze.

And if those who know me say, "Well, he's retired now and changing color," that's not true. I have never voted on a millage issue, and that

includes during my retirement years.

Teachers' salaries and benefits in Michigan are among the top four when compared to those in other states.

Times are tough in Michigan right now. Communities need this time to see what is finally coming down from Gov. John Engler and his Lansing buddies.

This fall, it will be interesting to see whether teachers in districts with a cash crunch go for a strike or for a "vote for kids" — the same scenario educators have used on parents in school millage elections for the last 30 years.

If teachers want to maintain the confidence of a public that has cared for them so well since negotiations started in 1965, it's now their moment to demonstrate they recognize the tough economic times of the '90s.

Will they vote for "kids" or for money? A teacher strike this fall will have residents under a new word: anathema, a thing or person to be greatly detested.

James "Doc" Doyle, a former teacher/school administrator/university instructor, is president of Doyle and Associates, an educational consulting firm.

Parent involvement necessary to child welfare

These are difficult times for parents. It isn't easy for children. The excesses of pop culture constantly bombard them, from Madonna and other rock stars to the lurid drug and sex stories found on network television. What child above 5 hasn't heard of Long Island Lolita?

We also can't shield them from harsh local or global realities, whether butchery in Yugoslavia or starvation in Somalia. What's worse, many negative media messages are aimed right at children.

While children know more at earlier and earlier ages, they also want more. Society has spawned much of this. Time-stressed, two-income families must rely on day care centers as well as the latchkey. Children are independent as never before, living in their worlds of Nintendo and MTV.

Our problem as parents is twofold. On one hand, the experiences of chil-

dren continue to get ahead of value system and family standards. At the same time, quite frankly, many parents are timid about enforcing limits of behavior. I'm talking about limits at all levels: from the family dinner table and regulation of viewing and reading material to dating curfews, driving privileges and even choice of friends.

Good parenting demands standards of behavior for the sake of a child's positive development. What is our own homework that we need to complete before setting this value system?

First, know what you are talking about. Read the magazines your children need to read; watch the movies and television shows they want to see. Know which heavy metal records contain vulgar or obscene lyrics; know which movies feature scenes that don't fit your family's value system. Dealing from such knowledge will establish credibility when you set limits.



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Second, know your children's friends, their peer group. Don't worry if the living room rug gets dirty. I don't mean to be smug, but let's get away from this overly secretive world that today's children inhabit. Encourage your children to play with their friends in the presence of your entire family. Take your children and their friends with you on that trip to the hardware store.

When children know you, they will trust you.

Third, know the parents of your children's friends. A good way to start is when your teen, for instance, is attending a party outside your home. Pick up the phone and introduce yourself to the host parents. Make sure that adults will supervise the party. Again, base your actions on knowledge, not first emotions.

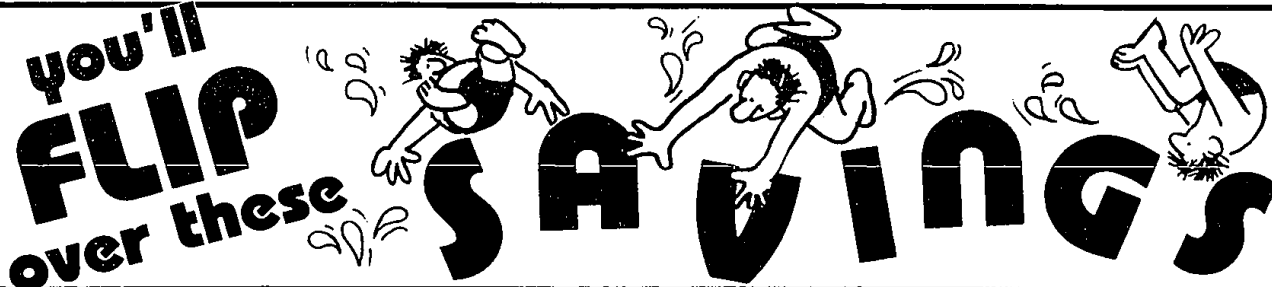
When done properly, what might have seemed to be old-fashioned be-

havior becomes reassuring behavior to children. Remember, we all harbor as many or more fears than we articulate.

By doing the things I have mentioned, we go a long way toward embracing the responsibilities as well as the rights of parenthood. Above all else, you must be in charge of your child's agenda. Guide and mold the "common sense" that will lead to responsible, consistent decision-making powers throughout life.

Sound value systems lead to respect for family and self, and, in turn, respect for others — a foundation of our entire society.

Thomas Herbst is the headmaster of Kensington Academy, an independent, coed, Catholic day school for pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students. To leave a message for him from a touchtone phone, dial 953-2047 mailbox number 1892.



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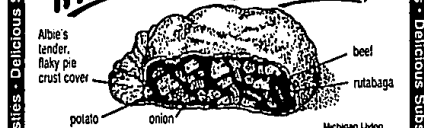
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