

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Concerns on finances?

It is interesting to note that Rochester Community Schools ranks 19th out of 28 school districts in Oakland County in per pupil expenditures.

This is considerably below the districts we are commonly compared with such as: Birmingham (1), Bloomfield (2), and Troy (7). Yet, while ranking 19th in spending, we rank in the top 5 or 6 districts in terms of MEAP scores. What this means is, we get a great educational value for the dollar here. This is no accident, although the value is often not recognized in our community. During times like these there are often many questions with regards to finance and spending.

I would like to take this opportunity to address some of the common financial concerns raised with regards to the bond election on March 18:

■ Why don't you pay for this out of the General Fund?

Rochester Community Schools are currently funded under Governor Engler's Proposal A which was Governor Engler's plan to structure financing away from local property tax to state funding. Under this plan our property taxes went down and the sales tax was raised to 6 percent.

Because of this change some people call this a tax shift and others, tax reform. Either way, we no longer may ask for mileage increases to fund our schools. We are given our increased per pupil allocation through the state budget process. THEREFORE, you local property taxes can no longer be increased by local election to enhance our General Fund revenues.

■ Are you going to raise our millage next?

The State took away the ability to raise local taxes to increase the General Fund. They still allow local school districts to ask for additional money to improve the infrastructure.

Increased funding for necessary building improvements, renovations, and new construction must be voted on through the bond process. The States does not factor in growth in the General Fund per pupil allocation and therefore recognizes the need for this

type of funding.

If you were smarter with the money, you wouldn't have to ask for more!

Because the State has so much control over our annual budgets, we are keenly aware of the need to revisit our departments for improved efficiencies.

For example, we restructured the business department saving approximately \$50,000. The business department works annually on energy conservation. Last year we saved \$143,433.00 on our energy program. We hope that the passage of the bond will realize more savings in this area. These savings are folded into the budget for program consideration. We also anticipate that funds used for structural maintenance at the two older high schools will now be available for other areas.

Where will you get the money for library books, technology and sports equipment for the new high school? It has already been factored into the cost of the bond. Because of their shelf life, their cost is expensed over the first seven years, not over the twenty year duration of the bond.

■ How will the district pay for all the additional expenses associated with a third high school?

Many of the expenses associated with the third high school will directly impact students, offering them more opportunities (i.e. sports, band, clubs). The Rochester community welcomes that kind of expenditure. The Board recognizes its responsibility to make necessary adjustments over the next three years, to the projected budget to insure those opportunities are available.

The uncertainties associated with State funding force us to plan more conservatively. It is the obligation of the Board of Education and the responsibility of the administration to adjust the budget over the next three years within the limits of the revenue sources and increased efficiencies, to realize this goal. If the bond fails, the general fund would be stressed by the undesirable expenses that are not in the best interest of students such as portables, split sessions, and a band-

aid approach to building repairs and structural maintenance.

One final thought; last year's two high school proposal was selected because it could be more easily accomplished within the projected General Fund budget. That plan failed. This year's plan, although imposing a heavier burden on our projected budget, is more in line with what the community wants for our children.

Darlene Woolsey Janulis,
president, board of education
Rochester Community Schools

Urges yes vote

We have a responsibility:

■ To vote in the March 18 school bond proposal election.

■ To be well informed prior to casting that vote.

■ To evaluate the qualifications of those openly urging a vote in favor of, or against, the bond proposal.

■ To assess the overall status of the educational opportunity offered by the Rochester Community Schools, and determine whether or not this proposal is in the best interest of the children in our community.

We need to understand:

■ The approval of this proposal will cost each of us some money. However, we each can afford our fair share! The question is a matter of our personal priority in the necessity to provide Rochester youngsters with a competitive education.

■ Rochester School Facilities are not competitive when compared to other "lighthouse school districts". The longer we wait to take action, the further behind we will become.

■ The educational opportunity offered to Rochester Students today has fallen behind the opportunities offered by many surrounding school districts. Other districts have invested significantly in technology infrastructures supporting the use of modern voice, video and data technologies in all classrooms. We have not.

As a former 12 year member of the Rochester Board of Education, I understand how our schools are

financed. I understand the degree to which student enrollment has grown. I have an appreciation of what goes on in the classroom and how teachers must teach to provide for maximum learning opportunity.

By profession, I have worked 34 years in the information processing industry, the last four years as a technology consultant to the K-12 educational community.

I have seen other school districts take advantage of effective curriculum modification. They have enhanced instructional opportunities and methods as a result of implementing state-of-the-art technologies (teaching/learning tools) in the classroom.

Yes, Rochester students need your support if the school facilities they will attend are to reach a comparable level with many of those from surrounding school districts.

I am shocked by the number of communications offering "a series of facts and conclusions" via letters to the editor of this newspaper. Many of these communications are from people unqualified to comment accurately.

Many letters published in the last few weeks are full of inaccurate information and half-truths. As mentioned above, evaluate the qualifications of the person providing the facts as well as the facts themselves.

Remember, the question is a matter of your personal priority in the necessity to provide Rochester youngsters with a competitive education. I urge your "yes" vote on March 18.

William G. Wagner,
Rochester Hills

Get the fat out

With the school board again asking for more bond issue money, it's time to first get the fat out of the school system with its administrative bloat. At least one other person has mentioned this subject in one of the recent editions.

I graduated in 1933 from Calumet High School up near Lake Superior. Here's a summary of the staff at that time in the Calumet School District.

The school system Superintendent

E. J. Hall and high school principal Mr. Treblecock each had a secretary. Treblecock had an assistant principal, Ella Rogers, who also had other duties — minding the assembly/study hall in the high school and teaching classes.

Mr. Allen ran the book store, and there were a few cooks in the high school cafeteria and a few janitors. Each grade school had a principal and a janitor.

Students rode school busses if they lived more than two miles from school.

There were no teacher aids in those days. That was the total roster for the teacher, administrative and custodial staff for a school system that graduated 205 students from the 12th grade in 1933.

The school board met in Hall's office, and his secretary took the minutes. There were no other administrators in the entire school system.

Contrast that with the administrative monstrosity we have in present day school systems (Rochester included), where the students nationwide are so poorly educated.

New demands on the present school systems are Technology and unavoidable Government busy work.

But what is the justification for the rest of the school system employees and administrators none of whom teach classes.

Teachers have told me that these administrators add work to the teachers that has no relevance to teaching. The new school board building might be compared to Hall's office.

I suggest a way to get at the fat is the creation of a fact finding group made up, not of educators, but of the people who the educators are supposed to serve — business and industry.

This group would audit the entire school system and suggest changes. Money saved by such changes could well be used to reduce the size of the perpetual bond issues.

Ahti Petaja,
Rochester Hills

Fixing education is role for the political process

For those who care about education in Michigan, last week was an extraordinary one.

■ In the first presidential address to a joint session of the Legislature since 1907, President Clinton urged national learning standards, national assessment tests and a tenfold increase in charter schools by 2000. His remarks were warmly endorsed by Gov. John Engler.

■ Oral arguments were heard before the Supreme Court challenging Michigan's original charter school law, which lower courts have ruled constitutional.

■ The state Senate, in a straight party-line vote, passed a bill to eliminate the current cap on the number of charter schools in districts where more than 2,000 students qualify for federal lunch program subsidies.

■ Ingham County Circuit Judge Carolyn Stell issued a preliminary injunction blocking Engler's executive order transferring to state Superintendent of Public Instruction Arthur Ellis many powers previously held by the State Board of Education.

It's clear. Education is the fulcrum around which our politics will swing for many years to come.

That's good. Our schools are not what they should be and how best to fix them is a fit subject for the political process.

Engler's Executive Orders transferring power from the (voter-elected) State Board of Education to the (Engler-appointed) superintendent of public instruction are particularly important. In 13 pages of single-spaced legalese, the orders gut the board's power to make new rules for charter schools, to revoke charters for failing charter schools and to determine school proficiency tests and certification standards for teachers and administrators.

On their face, the orders appear to violate Article III, Sec. 3 of the Michigan Constitution, which gives the state board, "leadership and general supervision over all public education" and "general planning and coordinating power" for all public education.

For the past six years in office, the governor was perfectly content to operate entirely through the state board. His party owned a 6-2 majority. His buddy, Clark Durant, was elected president. Their friend, Art Ellis, got hired as state school superintendent. Together, they ran a full-blown right-wing school agenda: charter schools, vouchers, prayer, even stock shares in the schools.



PHILIP POWER

Then something interesting happened in the elections last November. Two Republican State Board members got bounced, making the new partisan balance 4-4. But one of the Republican members is moderate Republican, Dorothy Beardmore, who has never made a secret of her skepticism of all the ideological foaming at the mouth going on.

So last Dec. 19, just before the makeup of the state board shifted, the governor suddenly discovered that board members don't really have all the power they had when things were 6-2 and issued his executive orders transferring power to his buddy, Superintendent Ellis.

I've always been impressed when a serious politician gets right down to it and just grabs for power, regardless of history, consistency, logic of the Constitution. Engler really impressed me this time.

Looks like he didn't impress a lot of other people. The board voted 5-3 (including Republican Boardmember) to reject Engler's orders. A bipartisan majority in the House (54 Democrats, 16 Republicans) followed suit. And when it looked as though enough Republicans were going to vote against it in the Senate, the GOP leadership adjourned the Feb. 25 session before a vote.

Now Judge Stell has called a halt. They'll be arguing in court about this for a long time, but for the time being, it looks as though Gov. Engler, Superintendent Ellis and the State Board of Education will have to do what the Constitution says.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

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