

All aboard

Keep parents part of big moves

Parents have a valid beef with the Farmington School District when it comes to the block scheduling proposal. The trouble is, some parents feel they aren't getting a say in how this innovative program is being put together and how it will affect their children, especially those in advanced placement programs. It could, they worry, cut the number of classes or hamper the timing of their for-college-credit tests after taking AP courses.

Parents weren't involved in the early planning stages and they're concerned that teachers have already decided that plans for block scheduling are on the fast track to approval, since administrators and teachers are already basically on-board and approving it. They fear this is one of those educational trains that's already chugging toward its destination without any chance of stopping or switching its track.

From their view, school officials see block scheduling as a chance to allow high school students longer, more in-depth collegiate

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classes within the usually tight confines of a high school day. They say parents were involved at the very front end of the planning process - during long-range planning of the Mission 2007 report and the secondary education study. And, they say, parents will be involved in the school's implementation committee.

The real gap is in between and it seems to have been one of communication. The parents who learned of the block scheduling plans want to make sure they get a voice in the planning going on now to protect the best interests of their students. You can't blame them. The district needs to work parents - and students for that matter - into all of its major changes during all stages of planning.

MEAP meter is only 1 yardstick

As a society, we demand accountability in many things. One of those is public education, and one of the tools we use today is the state-mandated Michigan Educational Assessment Program, or MEAP, tests. The tests have been upgraded in recent years to test more comprehensive skills of students, instead of just the basics as they did in the beginning.



could have boosted the scores instead of dragging them down; one official said five more correct answers would have raised scores considerably.

We have no doubt this tiny district will work hard to improve scores. This is a fiercely proud community and one in which many people have chosen to live because of the fine schools. Parents are involved and will likely jump in on the most recent MEAP note to help boost scores - and their district's image.

In Farmington, school-by-school scores show a wide variety of ups and downs, as far as the number reaching a satisfactory level. The district's assessment officials are digging into the reams of data on the tests trying to figure out what went right and wrong. They're looking at test questions and how they're different from last year. We hope what's learned will be shared across the district to help all students improve - not only on state tests, but in what and how they learn.

There may be a lesson in nearby Livonia. Officials there have assigned an administrator to focus on nothing but the MEAP test. This person will work, building-by-building, with each school community in an effort to boost test scores districtwide.

We hope this MEAP-mania is kept in perspective in our sports scoreboard society. We want students to score well on state tests - and not only as proof that our educators are doing their jobs and earning their pay. More important than any year's MEAP gain or fall is that our schools measure up in preparing children to succeed in college, in work and in life.

An average, fifth-place holiday

The first Father's Day card, according to the Hallmark "Holiday Handbook," was carved in clay nearly 4,000 years ago by a Babylonian youth named Elmesu. The "card" wished Elmesu's father good health and a long life. It isn't clear where the researchers turned up this trivial tidbit (or whatever happened to Elmesu or his father), but the point seems to be that the notion of honoring one's father has been around for a long time.



One of the Ten Commandments says to "Honor thy father and thy mother," and the Greek dramatist Aeschylus wrote that "reverence for parents stands written among the three laws of most revered righteousness."

The modern Father's Day celebration doesn't trace its roots to such antiquity. Credit for this occasion is generally given to Sonora Smart Dodd of Spokane, Wash., daughter of a Civil War veteran whose wife died while giving birth to their sixth child. William Jackson Smart became both a father and a mother to the children. Mrs. Dodd began to reminisce about her father while sitting in church in 1909 listening to a Mother's Day sermon.

She began a movement to encourage churches to hold similar services in June (the month of her father's birth) honoring fathers. On June 19, 1910, the first Father's Day celebration was observed in Spokane.

The idea spread across the country and by 1924 received support from President Calvin Coolidge. It wasn't until 1966, however, that

the day was officially recognized by a joint resolution of Congress and not until 1966 that a presidential proclamation by Lyndon Johnson set the date of the observance as the third Sunday in June. That date was later reaffirmed in a resolution signed by President Richard Nixon in 1972.

As a "Hallmark Holiday," Father's Day is pretty much middle of the road. The company says it is the fifth largest card-sending occasion, preceded by Christmas (No. 1), Valentine's Day, Easter and Mother's Day and followed by graduations, Thanksgiving, Halloween, St. Patrick's Day and Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur.

There are no particular customs associated with the observance, no national traditions, no parades, no fireworks. Since it's observed on a Sunday, it's already Dad's day off. No extra time away from work. Breakfast in bed is associated more with Mother's Day than Father's, and if some families observe the day with a backyard cookout, it's probably Dad who is manning the grill. (Not that he'd allow anyone else to touch it!)

The holiday, like the fathers it is designed to honor, is pretty average. Nothing very special. But then Sonora Smart Dodd's father was nothing very special - except to his family. And that Babylonian father 4,000 years ago was probably not too special either - except to his son who carved a message in clay to wish him good health and a long life.

That's what this "average holiday" is all about - families honoring those ordinary fathers who are something very special to them.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Who was the hardest working Detroit Red Wing this season?



"Steve Yzerman. He gets little jobs done that win games. He always does his job to it's fullest. He plays hockey for fun."
Jay Outh
Farmington Hills



"Steve Yzerman. He's bound and determined. He wants to win the cup. If Konstantinov were still playing this year, he would have been one of the leaders."
Geno Grabnski
Redford



"Yzerman. He sets up most of the plays and works really hard to help people score."
Joel Rosen
Farmington Hills



"Yzerman. He's the captain. He has to help the coach with the plays."
Ryan Dunn
Farmington Hills

LETTERS

Become a 'friend'

On May 29, the Friends of the Farmington Libraries were treated to a memorable evening. Fantastic food and pastries were provided by the Vineyards and Baker's Loaf. David Syne, pianist, presented a most entertaining program of classical and popular music. This was the library's 12th annual gala. All this can be yours, too, by becoming a Friend of the Library. Your support of the Aug. 4 millage vote for expanding the Farmington Libraries will insure the wonderful service our free libraries provide. Become a Friend of the Library. Join now. Call the Library at 659-0300. Vote for the millage Aug. 4.

Gertrude Pinkney
Farmington Hills

Delivering the charity

On Saturday, May 9, 1998, the carriers at our Indoplex Unit and Main Office collected 21,600 pounds of food from the residents of Farmington/Farmington Hills. The food was donated to the Salvation Army, Boys Republic and St. Alexander's.

The generosity and compassion of all postal carriers and postal customers helped many grateful organizations provide help to those in need.

Thank you to all our giving customers and letter carriers.

Marlene Bowers
postmaster
Farmington/Farmington Hills

Jolicoeur brings fresh air

This letter is to express my strong support for Linda Jolicoeur, Republican candidate for Oakland County commissioner, District 18, in the Aug. 4 Republican primary. Linda is an experienced, trusted and well-respected entrepreneur and leader in the Farmington area and holds much promise for our community as an Oakland County commissioner. As an example of the respect and admiration which others hold for her, Linda has been honored with appointments to boards, commissions and offices by Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, Gov. John Engler and Regional Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

In recognition of her outstanding contributions to our community, business and government, Linda has also received several awards, including 10-Year Gold Pin, Michigan Metro Girl Scouts; Advocacy Award, National Association of Women Business Owners, Greater Detroit; Pioneering Spirit, National Association of Women Business Owners, Greater Detroit; Athena Award; Oakland County Chamber of Commerce & Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber Wonder Woman Award;

and Women's Survival Center, Citizen of the Week - WWJ Radio.

Linda is an honest breath of fresh air in an era fouled by the stench of political expediency, mediocrity and compromise. I invite my fellow citizens to join with me in supporting her candidacy in the Aug. 4 primary election and November general election.

Mark H. Cleveley
Farmington Hills

Raise the low end of MEAP

As a parent of a Farmington Middle School student, I again had to suffer the annual bragging of high average performance on the MEAP test. I chose the word "suffer" carefully in recognition of the total lack of meaning the average score has in reporting these test results.

The test is segregated into the testing of specific basic skills and is a test of individual students. It is a test of basic skills, skills that the district claims, and the community should expect, every child should possess. However, the same middle school buildings (that boast of a high average score, quietly presented the results that show 25 percent of their students scored in the lowest category. Having analyzed this data in the past, I can tell you that those 25 percent are not clustered one or two questions away from a "Satisfactory" rating but are strung out in a long series of scores cascading far below the touted average score. The extent of this phenomena and its consistency from year-to-year is the real measure of the quality of instruction and learning occurring in the classroom.

The solution is and has been known for a long time. It is a matter of delivering instruction that is responsive to the individual learning of the students in the classroom. When 25 percent of the students cannot achieve a "moderate" on a multiple choice test of basic skills, there is a major disconnect between instruction and students. Bragging of a high average score is not demonstrative that anyone is being held accountable for their lack of performance. Bragging of a high average test score is not communicating appropriately with the school's "partners," the parents of the students. Farmington Public Schools' students, and the taxpayers deserve a better and more productive response.

David L. York
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared: We will help by editing for clarity and brevity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a daytime contact telephone number.

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— Phillip Power