

Farmington Observer

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

Give school start time plan a rest for now

You really don't have to survey a group of high school students to find out whether they're sleepy in a 7:40 a.m. class.

Without question, sleep deprivation is a problem for many of today's teenagers. And it's a dangerous problem. According to the National Institutes of Health, adolescents and young adults ages 12 to 25 are a population at high risk for problem sleepiness.

A 1997 study showed drowsiness and fatigue were the principle cause in at least 100,000 traffic crashes each year — and drivers under age 25 caused more than half of fall-asleep crashes.

But is changing the time they start their school day a solution Farmington Public Schools can afford?

Frankly, we're not sure, and we haven't seen a clear answer in the research presented by local school officials. That's why we're urging them to go slow, rather than try to implement this kind of change too soon.

Last year, officials from Edina Public Schools in Minnesota made a presentation to a group of local districts at a meeting spearheaded by Farmington school officials. They talked about the advantages of later school start times and provided anecdotal evidence that students are benefiting from the extra sleep.

But Edina is not Farmington and Minnesota is not Michigan. And nobody from Minneapolis Public Schools, where later start times have been more problematic, showed up to tell their side of the story.

Minneapolis is an enormous school district — with seven high schools, seven middle schools and 71 elementary schools. The district chose to stagger start times in order to avoid additional busing costs. In an article published in "Phi Delta Kappan" magazine, teachers complained the three-tiered bus system meant students in the middle of the schedule often arrived late.

Additional research by the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement indicates that while participation in activities didn't affect students' self-reported letter grades, practice times affected by school start times did. After-school participation would often mean missing the last class of the day, and changing practice times to before school would strike the benefit of later school

start times for active students.

In terms of impacts, however, that's just the tip of the iceberg. Later start times could affect traffic patterns, after-school child care, student employment — and researchers say trying to determine the differences in academic performance between schools with early and late start times may be impossible, because so many variables exist.

Edina is a smaller school district, with one high school. While they've had a positive experience overall, the most important finding we've seen in school start research is that no one's plan is going to work in every community.

What concerns us most is the apparent rush to implement this change here. Superintendent Bob Maxfield wants a report to school board members in April, and he's asking subcommittee members to meet again in February. While he's

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acknowledged this isn't going to get done for the 2002-2003 school year, Maxfield's still shooting for the fall of 2003.

However, a change with this many implications, particularly a change that could prove costly to the district (estimates range from \$400,000 to \$600,000, plus the potential need for a \$250,000-\$300,000 bus garage expansion), requires far more study and dialogue with the community than can be accomplished in a year's time. Not to mention Farmington Public Schools is already facing a \$5 million deficit, continuously increasing costs for special education and state funding that is uncertain at best.

With all due respect to the district's enthusiastic efforts, we believe this is a time to slow down, communicate with stakeholders, carefully and accurately assess the costs and the benefits of later school start times.

Everyone's motives are pure here. Everyone wants to do what's in the best interest of sleep-deprived students. We'd just like to be certain before this decision is made that everyone's eyes are wide open.

New Detroit mayor must bridge city-suburbs gap

As a state legislator, Kwame Kilpatrick proved fairly adept at working with his brethren on both sides of the aisle.

In his new role as Detroit's mayor, it's time to see whether he can work his political magic on both sides of the Detroit city line.

If he wants to pull Detroit out of the economic pit into which it has fallen, Kilpatrick will have to do just that.

Cities across the nation are reeling economically in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks; some analysts say Detroit not only is suffering more, but will have the toughest time recovering. To get it done, Kilpatrick is going to need the support and wealth of business leaders that have fled the city for greener suburban pastures.

Proof Kilpatrick recognizes the need for cooperative relations with his neighbors lies in the bill he authored and pushed through the Republican-led state House of Representatives. The creation of a more powerful regional transportation authority would be a political coup of major proportions considering the state of the city's own bus system and the reluctance of leaders to relinquish control of the SMART system.

The lack of any real regional transportation system will have a negative effect on Detroit's ability to recover economically. The passage of Kilpatrick's bill, which has the endorsement of Gov. John Engler but still must navigate the state Senate, would be a great step in the right direction.

Kilpatrick's inclusive nature could also help in another area of concern, especially in light of Sept. 11 — acceptance of racial diversity.

While diversity dominates Detroit's culture, the racial make-up becomes

more homogenous outside the city, particularly when you get into parts of western Wayne County. Livonia, for instance, was identified in the 2000 Census as one of the country's "whitest" cities of more than 100,000 people.

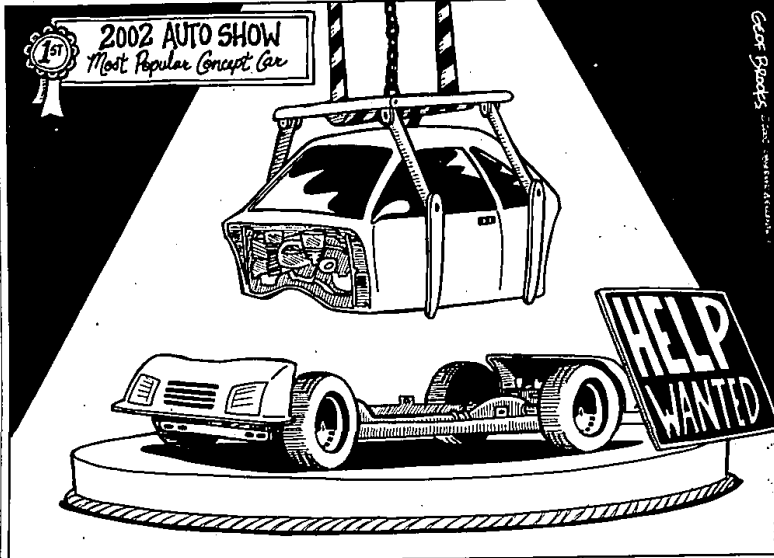
With his abiding nature, his appeal to a wider range of age groups and his ability to work both sides, Kilpatrick has a real chance to do some racial healing in the metro Detroit area.

Kilpatrick is aware of the major challenges he faces. He's got a police department that badly needs a shake-up, in attitude if not structure. The mayor's office and the city council haven't often seen eye to eye. City services struggle to meet residents' needs and the city is weighed down by its own bureaucracy. Kilpatrick also appears to know his history. He knows Coleman Young had such disdain for the suburbs, he once threatened to use them as a dumpster for the city's criminal refuse. He also knows his immediate predecessor, Dennis Archer, made great strides in linking Detroit to its neighboring communities before getting bogged down in big-city problems.

Kilpatrick's ability to work both sides of the aisle should work to his advantage. Working with Wayne County Executive Ed McNamara, a Democrat and huge Kilpatrick booster, shouldn't be a problem; dealing with powerful Republican L. Brooks Patterson in Oakland County could be trickier.

At an inauguration event at his alma mater, Cass Tech High School, Kilpatrick talked about his abilities as a student.

How he handles the suburbs will show whether he paid attention to history or whether he's doomed to repeat it.



LETTERS

Dwyer's no hero

After reading the guest column of Jan. 3, 2001 by Estralee Michaelson, we realize our worst fears are already upon us. In a nutshell, the most dangerous long-term fallout from 9-11 is not the next inevitable nuclear targeting of our American way of life.

It is the foolish and complacent attitude toward law enforcement, fostered by the misplaced sorrow and grief for the true brave souls that perished at the World Trade Center. We have all seen the photo of the brave firefighter ascending the stairs at the WTC as thousands of frightened workers frantically descended.

That firefighter is a true hero in every sense of the word. To elevate Chief Dwyer to the same status of those who gave their lives at the WTC, just because he wears a uniform, is an insult to anyone with an IQ above the level of Forrest Gump.

In addition, we would like to clarify a couple of related points here. Yes, community volunteers attended the meeting of Oct. 4 to discuss fresh new strategies to boost the interest in the Observer. Suggestions ranged from adding a comic strip section to adding true investigative reporting that readers could "sink their teeth into."

Almost immediately, that benign and non-inflammatory comment was twisted into the tall tale of "blood and guts" that Ms. Michaelson puts forth. After all, in her position as Director of Safe Schools and Student Services, Ms. Michaelson is very sensitive to any concept, no matter how absurd, that can be twisted into something evil and wicked. Which brings me full circle to why we continue to challenge the irresponsible actions of Chief Dwyer. Observer readers now have a cursory understanding of what happened to the "evil" dentist who allegedly held a woman against her will for a month. I have consulted with a judge who is familiar with the case and the testimony before the court. The Observer has not managed to convey the seriousness of this miscarriage of justice against an innocent citizen who happened to become involved with the wrong person.

Right or wrong, this type of liaison happens every day to all kinds of people. Luckily, few of them cry "rape" after the relationship ends and the parties simply move on. The evidence before the court would suggest that the woman apparently carried on normal day to day activities while supposedly being held "captive" according to Chief Dwyer.

It is our belief that, once again, Chief William Dwyer values yet another 15 second sound bite on the local news over the life, livelihood and civil liberties of a citizen and business owner here in Farmington Hills. And yes, Chief Dwyer continues to insult this individual, despite the case having been thrown out of court.

We find it patently absurd that Ms. Michaelson would have intelligent citizens blindly follow Chief Dwyer claiming that the department's integrity is "above reproach" (and should therefore be "unconditionally supported"). Chief Dwyer has appeared innumerable times, along with his apologists in the media, touting his reputation as "above reproach."

Our personal experience and that of numerous others begs to differ. However, once something is repeated so many times, it can actually take on a life of its own, no matter how untrue it really is.

In Ms. Michaelson's closing words she suggested that there are "better ways" to resolve differences in our community. We couldn't agree more. With all due respect to Ms. Michaelson, her position and her opinions, we invite her to step forward and bring her expertise and her "better ways" to the table.

Perhaps the staff of the Observer or the Chamber of Commerce would consider moderating such a forum. Despite the fact that we have made sincere efforts similar to this in the past, we have only come away from these meetings empty-handed and with a clearer understanding of what futility means.

Mark and Jean Gordanier
Farmington Hills

Folding paper napkins

Regarding the Dec. 20 editorial *GOP reform cuts choice for Michigan's electors*, The editorial complained about the Michigan GOP voting to eliminate straight party voting. I think the writer meant in the general elections.

I'm no expert on the subject, but it seems to me that both the GOP and the writer of the editorial are folding paper napkins. First, if I'm not mistaken, isn't it a fact that one can vote only a straight party ticket already in the primary in Michigan? That already eliminates a ton of would-be candidates.

And the question about it eliminating long voter lines — that is — voters taking too long in voting booths by selecting split tickets. Maybe I'm alone on this, but what long voting lines?..in Michigan elections?..in general elections? Maybe I'm wrong, but if it ain't broke, why try to fix it?

Kenneth Kemp
Farmington Hills

Music column insults

I am writing in response to the Dec. 20 column by Paul Beaudry concerning the efforts of parents to exercise their rights to monitor the media intake of their children while riding on the Farmington public school buses.

The column is insulting in tone and bizarre in logic. Mr. Beaudry recognizes the legitimate authority of parents to exercise discretion over their children's television habits. Such a position is appropriate in an age of v-chips and the constant mantra that "if you don't like what you're watching on TV, turn it off."

Strangely, he then believes that such parental rights are abdicated when their children enter a school bus. Regardless of parental input, he believes children must be subjected to endless radio chatter. The only justification offered by the school district for this policy amounts to, "the radio shuts up those noisy kids."

The district's position is intolerant of those parents who choose not to use the radio as a pacifier. Rather than interpret their judgment, the school district should respect the diversity of the families who ride their buses (who attend both public and religiously-affiliated schools). The simple and fair solution? Turn the radios off and let the parents who think otherwise buy their child a Walkman.

We live in an age of constant bombardment and advertising overload. Can't we expect that children would be free from this in a school setting?

As one who has survived riding a sometimes noisy and always radio-free school bus as a child, I can see no harm and much good from a policy that would keep the radios off.

Rev. Robert J. McClary, J.D.
Associate Pastor
St. Isidore Catholic Church
Macomb

Education, entertainment

Americans watch TV and movies for education as well as entertainment.

Chemistry and math are easier to understand when taught by performers on the screen than struggling with professors and textbooks in a school lab. Science and economics are so misunderstood that ancient windmills are seen as keys to the future and atomic energy is a relic of the past.

Since this teaching tool won't support taking oil and gas from our homeland or buying it from the Middle East, what other choices are there?

Pass another law requiring more miles per gallon, resulting in lighter, more dangerous vehicles. Use natural farm products, even though a gallon of ethanol requires more than a gallon of gasoline to produce it (factoring in fuel used to cultivate and process the grain). The more ethanol used, the more petroleum required.)

Fuel cells burn hydrogen and create water, but even more energy is required to separate the hydrogen fuel from water in the first place. An exploding zeppelin demonstrated a major problem with hydrogen.

Electric cars carry dangerous lead-acid batteries that need frequent recharging, usually provided by coal-fired power plants. Hybrid vehicles carry only small loads and struggle up long hills. Drivers purchase big SUVs to feel personally safe.

Atomic energy plants still hum 60 years after going online. Nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and submarines travel for years without refueling. Trucks, trains and boats could use similar propulsion and power plants could be installed close to the areas they serve.

Only hysteria makes this alternative unacceptable. If scientists wrote more scripts or screenwriters studied more science education might improve but, it would not be as entertaining.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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