



Liz Taylor, a member of the committee that proposed the project, asks questions at the project announcement.

**DIVERSITY**

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received an invitation to attend an Oct. 23 meeting at the school. About 30 of 90 attendees.

Some families have been in the district since their children started school; others are newly-transferred or transferred here a few years ago.

The discussion included the importance of having the necessary, timely information to make decisions.

"This isn't borne out of crisis, but borne out of caring," Jones said of the group. "We're here to say, 'What can we do as adults in our kids' lives? We have to advocate for all kids.'"

Presenting a unified front with a broad cross-section of student participation in all activities is important, he said.

"We're also taking a hard look at honors classes to find out the mix-up of those classes," Jones said.

When students come to the high school, faculty don't know their work ethic or home background and take the recommendations of eighth grade teachers. "We want to find out if something is breaking down between eighth and ninth grades," Jones said.

The group's goals are: academic achievement — tutoring, mentoring, support groups, participation in curriculum development, online learning and transition program.

Inclusiveness — support of the Student Round Table, the Black Student Association, the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural Multiracial Council and new parent orientation.

social interactions — career day, community project and parental involvement.

communication — newsletter, parental involvement/participation/encouragement in tryouts, calendar of yearly events, being a parent advocate at schools, issue resolution as a parent liaison and liaison to the Black Student Association.

About 99 percent of last year's graduating class at North Farmington went on to college. The district has 12,200 students who come from homes where 85 languages are spoken.

"They come to us all expecting to have their fair share of the American dream," Maxfield said.

However defined, the district wants to know whether quality

experiences, like advanced placement classes and participation in athletic games, are shared equally.

Students and their parents want to take AP classes, in effect, make the decision in the fifth grade when they discover the student is really adept in a particular field, Maxfield said.

Loretta Clemons, a long-time district parent and engineer, said this track was new to her.

"There's information which doesn't get out," Clemons said. "People coming into the community may have missed some of the opportunities."

Clemons' parents were blue-collar and didn't attend college. "As an African American, I feel it's extremely important our kids learn how to take those (college entrance) exams and learn how to compete," she said. "When I got into college I learned a lot of those kids took those tests multiple times. Nobody told me I could take the ACT over. That's how they boosted their score."

Richards said the group's goals are a way to expand understanding and awareness.

"Your comments are a testimony to what we are trying to do," Richards said. "There are so many members of the com-

munity who aren't familiar with all the intricacies of Farmington Public Schools."

Debbie Simmons, a parent, nurse practitioner, and former Oakland University faculty member, asked for clear, objective criteria to guide parents early regarding things like honors classes.

Simmons hopes the advisory group will expand to include all district high schools.

Richards said he's met more African American parents in the last month than he's met in 12 years.

Darcie Layne, a North Farmington High social worker, sees her role as a liaison. "We see these students in their environment," Layne said. "We want to enhance their comfort level. We need to be there for parents if we need to alter the climate."

Success builds on belonging, said Rosemary Hare, a North Farmington High parent and science teacher at Taft Middle School in Detroit. "If students feel they don't fit in, they stop trying."

For more information, to volunteer for subcommittees, or to find out future meeting dates, call Eric Christian at (248)788-7803. Or write him at echristian@ameritech.net

**STUDENTS**

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the road was forgotten until Friday when Knollenberg was joined by Hills Mayor Nancy Bates and City Manager Steve Brock to make the announcement.

"I'm happy that it got it done," she said.

In 2000, students in former teacher Jenny Barto's government class decided to make their government participation project personal by pushing to make the 12 Mile entrance safer. Students lobbied local, state and federal officials and their efforts paid off, Knollenberg said.

For fiscal year 2003 under the Transportation Appropriations Act, he said he secured a federal grant of \$750,000 for Oakland County to engineer and widen the road, which will also help motorists making left turns

into several apartment complexes, an office complex and subdivision entrances on that busy stretch of 12 Mile.

Brent Bair, managing director for the Road Commission for Oakland County was also at the meeting. The ROCOC has jurisdiction over the road. Bair said the funds should pay for the widening, with the city of Farmington Hills and the Road Commission each chipping in 10 percent.

If all goes well, the project could be done by the start of next school year, he said.

Knollenberg said he would seek more federal funds for the following year to extend the road widening to Orchard Lake. "You put pressure on us, you told us what the problem could be," he told students in teacher Angela Leach's third hour government class.

"I wanted the students and teachers to know the system does work," he said.

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**District takes proactive approach to race issues**

BY SUE BUCK

STAFF WRITER

Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield believes how people are included is a fundamental issue in suburban communities.

Speaking last month about the formation and continuing evolution of the African American Parent Advisory Forum at North Farmington High School, Maxfield said the aim of that initiative was to take a pro-active approach to the issues surrounding diversity.

"The beauty of the group is that it is meeting when there isn't a problem," Maxfield said.

Ten percent, or about 1,200, of the district's 12,000 students are African American.

The 2001 racial breakdown

cited about 90 African American students out of 1,350 students at North Farmington High School.

At Harrison, there are 200 African American students in the 1,200-member student body and about 110 African American students in Farmington High School's 1,350 student population.

Last spring, Maxfield and North Farmington High School Principal Rick Jones met with David Garrett who sits on the Birmingham Bloomfield school board.

Garrett organized a similar parent forum at Groves High School in Birmingham about 10 years ago.

It started after a flap over Neo-Nazi activities directed at minorities, Maxfield explained.

"Parents had a quarrel with the way the school handled it and felt the school wasn't sensitive," he said. "Parents said maybe they have a role in ensuring African American success and started Saturday 'tutorials.' Rick and I met with David Garrett last spring...Where Rick comes from, I think we are doing fine."

"I have a feeling, I think we can do better. We took the initiative."

The time to ask questions about whether the district is doing its best for minority students is now, Maxfield said.

"It's an exploratory kind of thing. This is constantly something I think about: 'Is there a need?'"

He noted there are perceptions that some faculty may

not consider someone of a particular race being not as academically inclined, he said.

Farmington Public School Board Member Pam Christian said the number of African American students at North Farmington is about twice as many as when her family moved here six years ago from Maryland.

"We are coming together when there is no crisis or impetus," she said. "It's a way to help kids learn better. It's the idea of transitions and with them fitting in. A lot are new to the area."

Families also deal with a disparity when students come from different school systems, Christian said.

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