

SENIORS

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meeting, the district appointed three more members to a committee that has been meeting over the past several months.

"The administration will not develop and present, nor will our board accept, a plan which does not meet the concerns of all stakeholders," Maxfield said. "These conditions must be met before the project is brought to

the board. Given the uncertain amount of time required for successful pilots and elective experiences, it would be premature to suggest a target date for making this a required experience."

Jan Colliton, assistant superintendent of instructional services, said the committee will work with staff and community members to develop a plan that answers these questions:

■ How will parents be involved?

■ Can the project be developed to appropriately fit into students' schedules?

"This is a particular concern from parents whose students are already heavily involved in academic classes and extra-curricular activities," Maxfield said.

■ How much will it cost?

■ How will planning progress be communicated to stakeholders?

■ What research is available concerning senior projects and how will the Farmington senior

project be evaluated?

The project will be tried out first in advanced placement classes. The experience in these classes will likely lead to a second stage.

"It is possible that the committee will recommend the establishment of optional, elective experiences at each of the high schools making it possible for some students to choose or elect to pursue senior projects," Maxfield said. "Hopefully, these elective experiences will take

various forms so that a variety of delivery systems can be explored."

He said expectations of the committee's findings are that:

■ the educational value of an elective or required senior project experience must be clearly articulated.

■ the recommendations must have the involvement and general acceptance of all stakeholders.

■ the budget implications must be clearly stated with a clear understanding that the

benefit justifies the cost. The program is expected to require additional staffing and materials.

Maxfield also instructed that this information be included in school newsletters, the Update and other appropriate publications.

A senior project committee meeting will be held from 8 a.m. to noon Nov. 21 at Harrison High School on 12 Mile in Farmington Hills.

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Parents want more input on proposed senior projects

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER

Developing the senior project concept is a Catch-22 of sorts, said Jan Colliton, assistant superintendent of instruction for Farmington Public Schools.

Senior projects are extensive, intensive and done by students in their senior year to demonstrate a student's knowledge of a topic they choose to research. The Farmington school board approved the concept, along with other changes in graduation requirements for the district.

Some parents want more input into the concept, and the implementation committee of teachers and administrators who've volunteered to work on it say they need time to develop it first.

But one of the biggest problems thus far, school officials say, has been getting the word out about what is and isn't happening.

"We haven't communicated effectively," said Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield at a Nov. 5 school board meeting.

No timetable has been set for implementing the requirement, however, some details have been discussed. Projects will likely be judged by a panel of volunteers, whose members will receive some training.

Students will either receive a pass/fail designation for their projects or a grade.

Those working on the concept have since renamed it "senior boards" to better distinguish it from other projects performed in the senior year.

Harrison High teacher Laurn Sparrow has conducted senior projects in her advanced placement classes, as a kind of "pilot" effort. Advanced placement classes were chosen because they typically have all senior-level students.

Parents who have spoken out about the issue seem skeptical. At the board's Nov. 5 meeting, Sharon Russell asked officials to place additional parents on the district steering committee.

"There's only one parent on that committee (Julie Devine), who is a wonderful parent but is very, very far this program," she said. "You need to find a more objective group of parents."

Since that time, the district added three members to the planning committee. They are Kim Heath, Farmington Area PTA Council president; and parents Sharon Russell and Pat Miller.

Heath and Russell both shared their concerns Nov. 5. Russell said she found difficulty making the leap of faith Maxfield asked for earlier in

the year. Heath mentioned a lack of communication and few public meetings on the subject.

"Please slow this project down," Heath said.

She talked about a meeting she attended Oct. 9 at Farmington High School. "The first disappointment for me was that the meeting wasn't held at night when working parents could attend," Heath said. "That first meeting was not well publicized."

Information about graduation requirements/senior project should be on the front page of the district newsletter or in the high school newsletter, Heath said.

She suggested a town meeting, which could also be broadcast on TV 10, the district TV station.

Heath is also concerned about teacher overload and asked whether teachers will have a life after the school day if they have to concentrate on

yet another project or activity.

"We want to see a balanced view of the senior project," Heath said. "We want to look at the bad and the ugly also."

Among her concerns were whether the program could be tested among students of varying abilities, rather than only AP students; whether students would "burn out"; and whether the program would prove too intensive to have just one person coordinating it for all three high schools.

The district has many challenges in the upcoming year, she added. Board President Linda Enberg reminded parents no final action has been taken.

"It's very easy to confuse the dedication and the passion of a group which has been charged with trying to pull this together with decisions which are in place for the future," said Enberg.

However, school officials have other concerns. From the

beginning, board member Jack Inch has questioned whether project judges would be completely objective.

"When I read this and saw such an emphasis on a research paper, my heart just sank," said board member Priscilla Brouillette.

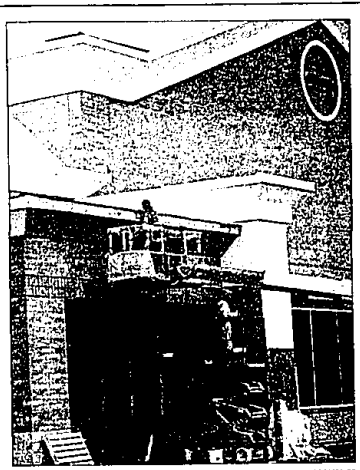
The project could be a research paper or journal, Colliton said.

Board member Gary Sharp said this is early in the development process.

"I want to see some type of estimate of the amount of staff time which will be involved in implementation," Sharp said.

There is no deadline for committee findings to be presented to the school board. A senior project committee meeting will be held from 8 a.m. to noon today (Thursday, Nov. 21) at Harrison High School on 12 Mile in Farmington Hills.

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Under way

Work continues at the Home Depot on Northwestern Highway.

Downtown Birmingham lights up with holiday cheer!

Friday, December 6
4-10 p.m.



- * Take in the sights and sounds of carollers, horsedrawn carriage rides and festive in-store events!

- * Shop and Win: A Downtown Birmingham Shopping Spree!

- * Enter the children's coloring contest and receive a complementary Snow Globe!

- * Enjoy free hot cocoa and gift wrapping at the Maple Street Cafe! *

- * Ride a free trolley around town to visit your favorite stores!

Shop and Win! December 5-8

Visit 10 participating stores and you'll be eligible to win a Downtown Birmingham Shopping Spree!

- * Pick up an entry form at a participating store!
- * Visit 10 stores and have your form stamped.
- * Drop off the completed form at Maple Street Cafe December 5-8.
- * Maple Street Cafe is located at 166 West Maple Road at Bates Street.

Here are just a few of the participating stores:

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Figures
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