

OUR VIEWS

## C'ville faces critical issues

Give the folks at Clarenceville Schools credit, they know a trend when they see one.

After Farmington School Board members voted in March to participate in Section 105 open enrollment, Clarenceville's schools of choice subcommittee re-opened discussions on the issue. Board members seem in no rush to judgment; they've set up a study session, open to the public, before their May 22 meeting.

Still, there is a critical issue here, one we urge Clarenceville officials to consider carefully as they make their decision. Farmington board member Gary Sharp, in public discussions about open enrollment, suggested most of Farmington's new students would come from homes in Farmington Hills — homes people brought without paying attention to which school district their children would attend.

That happened to Clarenceville Board Chair Matthew Boettcher, who told the *Observer* several years ago he and his wife were surprised to find the home they wanted to buy in Farmington Hills was also in Clarenceville School District. After some investigation, they went ahead with the purchase and have never regretted their decision.

Will some Clarenceville parents opt to send their children to Farmington Schools? Certainly, some will apply. If there are more applications than slots, a drawing will determine enrollments.

The more important philosophical issue for Clarenceville, however, is the current fiscal condition of neighboring districts from which their students are open enrolled. Superintendent Cheryl Leach is concerned that Southfield, facing financial difficulties, will choose not to pay for its open-enrolled students, which the law allows because Clarenceville isn't a Section 105 district. School officials should look carefully at enrollment trends and how they might be affected by the actions of neighboring districts. And we urge parents and staff members, even students, to learn more and speak their minds either at the open forum or privately to board members and school administrators.

In such a small district, even the slightest enrollment ripples could cause big waves.

## Both sides miss mark in water bill battle

There has been plenty of political hand-wringing and gnashing of the teeth in the past year over the operations of the regional water system and its governing board.

Sadly, the dispute over water rates has been reduced to name calling, charges of department incompetence and allegations that efforts to wrest control of the board away from the city of Detroit are being fueled as much by racist attitudes as unhappiness with the water delivery system.

Unfortunately, none of the political posturing has done a thing to find a meaningful compromise in the dispute, which has grown to entangle the governor's office and left homeowners confused — and misinformed — over what is actually paid for out of their water bills.

Instead of working together to improve our water delivery system, politicians on both sides of the dispute seem more interested in assessing blame.

Suburban leaders, in arguing for a new oversight board that would be controlled by the suburbs, attacked the Detroit water department as being incompetent and insensitive to their concerns. Detroit officials chose to respond by running full-page newspaper ads pointing the finger at local municipalities for spiraling cost increases instead of sitting down with their suburban counterparts to discuss meaningful reform.

Both sides have been disingenuous in their public relations campaigns and have not served their constituents well. For instance, those trying to wrestle control of the department away from the city of Detroit would have us believe that the recent price hikes would be unnecessary if the department were run more efficiently.

Similarly, the Detroit authority makes it sound like local municipalities are hiding stealthy tax increases by loading up local water bills with unrelated surcharges and blaming the increases on Detroit.

Getting to the bottom of this latest city-versus-suburbs fight is no easy task, but neither is delivering pure, fresh drinking water to a thirsty suburb up to 60 miles from the source and then disposing of their waste to boot.



Clarenceville students Victor Gjonaj, Eric Jones, Brad Schwartz and Tony Burton filed past the George Washington Bible and asked a few questions from Mason Jason Sheridan. Thanks to Garden City Builders Masonic Lodge No. 587, school children throughout the area got a close-up look at this historic treasure last week.

### LETTERS

#### Appalled

Most all of our lives have changed since 9/11. With my 23 year-old son, Michael, he felt the need for a deeper commitment to community, state, and country. Already a firefighter, he enlisted in the Army National Guard of Michigan.

With one ultimatum after another given to Saddam Hussein, and Saddam's refusal to work with the U.N. fully, Michael knew the chances of going to war were high.

In late January, when Michael was heading for Fort Jackson, S.C. for basic training, learning how to protect and serve his country from the threat of terrorism both abroad and at home, Mr. (Aldo) Vagnozzi was moving into his new office as State Representative to serve his constituency.

While Michael was going through orientation and was being handed his uniform that he wears so proudly, Mr. Vagnozzi was hanging a No War sign outside his office door. By the time Michael made it to the part of the training where he was crawling under barbed wire, in the dirt and mud, with live fire only three feet above his head, he knew the 12 years of talking with Hussein had been exhausted. The war had started. Mr. Vagnozzi's sign still hung outside his office.

While Mr. Vagnozzi has every right to free speech, we are at war, a war to eliminate the likes of Saddam using these weapons on American soil and freeing his own people from the fear of him using these weapons on them again. I find it both appalling and disgraceful that an elected official of the people, to serve the people, can't act aside his feelings and partisanship to support President Bush and our troops... the same troops that will and are putting their life on the line to secure our way of life and the very right to free speech that we all enjoy now.

Mike Draham  
Farmington Hills

#### Disheartened

For parents seeking a better education for their children, the first three months of Representative Aldo Vagnozzi's term are disheartening.

Recently, the Michigan House passed House Bill 4148 in spite of Vagnozzi's opposition. HB 4148 increases the number of allowable public charter schools, potentially expanding education opportunities for thousands of children abandoned by their current schools. During the debate on the bill, Vagnozzi proposed one amendment and supported seven others designed to limit the effectiveness of charters. Fortunately, his efforts were overcome.

Why would someone who promotes local control and accountability oppose measures that place that control into the hands of the parent? Also, I don't understand why well-intentioned men and women ignore the advantages that choice and competition bring to our country. These characteristics turned the United States into the most prosperous nation in

the world.

Why must thousands of children continue to be left in the clutches of poorly performing schools? Many of these children already face the obstacles of poverty and broken homes. Why continue adding a poor education to the mix?

Steve Sutton  
Farmington Hills

#### New math

Your editorial on the pilot program proposed by the Farmington school district really brought the new math used by the school system into focus.

Instead of cutting expenses the school district proposes to enroll out of district students. These students will generate payments from the state but not enough to cover all their expenses to the district. So now here is where the new math comes in.

The district will lose money on each out of district student but will make it up on the volume. Isn't this the same accounting technique used by Enron and don't we know how that turned out?

Paul Wezak  
Farmington Hills

#### Biased

I feel I must respond to your biased editorial ("Pilot program deserves a shot," March 27).

What is so "troubling" about a parent suggesting to close a school now, rather than later, before we spend another few hundred thousand dollars for another year and then decide to close it? As far as educating "outsiders" is concerned (and it is rather refreshing in this oh-so-PC time to hear someone actually use a word that expresses exactly what they mean) a great percentage of taxpayers in this area have moved here and struggle to pay taxes here so that their children can be educated in our school district.

If we have to pay more than the state allows to educate our children and it comes out of our taxes, why should we embrace "outsiders"? I don't see a "velled bigotry" here! What I see is economic sense.

We have been told in your own screaming headlines that this school system is five million dollars in debt. Here are some of my concerns:

How much did that new cafeteria computer system cost? And if the amount is over \$100,000, could we have a better reason for spending that much money than saving a child from embarrassment at handling the cashier a card for free lunch?

Let me see, was it 84 students we lost to schools of choice last year or was it 64? And weren't some of those because families moved? And what about the new students? Oh, we didn't count those or did we? And we didn't mean that the bus size was 24-1 we only meant that's the ratio used to hire personnel.

In the schools on Wednesday morning (3-10-03), we could pick up a printed sheet that explained what the Board's decision was and why. Did some dedicat-

ed printer work all night or were these announcements printed before the decision was supposedly made?

Susan Waters  
Farmington Hills

#### Out of context

I was the one who talked at the board meeting about lack of trust. My comments were taken totally out of context.

I cited specific reasons for lack of trust. One was the fact that an oversight committee was already being formed when the papers we were given indicated that was not supposed to happen until the fall. Thus, not allowing concerned folks who might wait until the fall to express a desire to be on this committee and allowing the committee to be "stacked."

Another possible reason for lack of trust would have back to the late start issue. That was all set to be put into effect until word leaked out, and it was stopped in its tracks.

When the school board decided to correct the overcounting in some of the elementary schools by changing the borders, there were no "informative" articles in the *Observer* to let parents know what was going on. Again word leaked out and parents were there.

And don't get me started on the new computer system in the cafeterias. I really would like to know how much money was spent on this. And the reason that was given for it (because poor, hungry children were so embarrassed to show a card indicating they qualified for free lunch they were not eating....please).

Let me tell you my greatest concern. It is not about these 20 students who will be allowed in next year. It will be in the following years. If our enrollment does what the experts predict what's to stop the board from opening up 200, 300, or 600 slots to keep a school open? Other districts are doing it.

Do you honestly believe that at the end of this year long pilot program we will hear anything but glowing recommendations and pat on the back for supporting it?

Connie Knie  
Farmington Hills

### 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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### QUOTABLE

"We don't turn down too many requests to come to school."

— Sam Slaughter, Bob Soliers Pontiac-GMC in Farmington Hills

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