

New class should return to drawing board

The national lament that Johnny can't read or write is old news. That Johnny doesn't vote and, more ominously, doesn't understand the underpinnings of American democracy will be the new reality ensuing from a dangerously misguided initiative of the Farmington Public Schools to drop required 12th-grade government for an international studies curriculum tainted by anti-American undercurrents.

Linda Slutberg

How unfortunate that our school board and administration failed to be responsive to the legitimate concerns of parents at the June 17 school board meeting, and effectively foreclosed meaningful community involvement on issues of such sweeping magnitude. The parent request was hardly radical: Table action pending a comprehensive review that should have been the result of proper process.

At a time when our way of life is under assault, it is painfully clear that our students need more grounding in American principles, not less. We owe it to them to solidly teach the precepts of our democracy before they enter the world to vote and put their lives on the line for our country.

By compacting 12th-grade government/civics into ninth grade, we dilute the lessons that define who we are as Americans. There is a world of difference in maturity and intellectual savvy between a 14- and an 18-year-old. There's no way a newly minted freshman can fully assimilate an overreaching curriculum originally designed for seniors. Just as our students take several years of math, science and language arts, we should insist they have as well-founded an understanding of govern-

ment. The district should maintain the requirements for a civics education reinforced by a more sophisticated analysis in 12th grade. Imagine the exciting possibilities of a dynamic experiential senior course (field trips to Washington, DC, contacts with legislators, drafting public policy initiatives, etc.) that would fully engage our students and prepare them for civic participation after graduation.

What a shame it would be to sacrifice this critical learning opportunity for the poorly researched and unbalanced international studies class adopted by a 4-3 split vote. A researcher at a national center for law and justice concludes: "The bias in factual selections, stances on controversial issues, etc. presented in this course is indisputable. This biased international curriculum may polarize our student body and contribute to divisiveness. Tensions at our high schools must be inflamed by exploitation of volatile political and ideological issues.

FATALLY FLAWED PROCESS

This seriously flawed curriculum is the product of a fatally flawed process. To begin with, the district failed in one of its primary responsibilities to inform parents and the community of this major revision and to solicit participation in the process.

Ironically, a district that seeks to celebrate the rich texture of our community failed to tap into that very diversity. When writing curriculum about global hot spots that are harnessed to our relatives, did the district seek the advice of parents, scholars, lay leaders, religious leaders? How many Indians and Pakistanis, Christians, Jews, Muslims, African Americans, Asian Americans, Serbs, Greeks, Macedonians, Latinos, etc. were embraced into the development of this curriculum of multiculturalism?

The district repeatedly dodges questions about the qualifications of the authors of the international studies curriculum. Do they have advanced degrees in international affairs, foreign policy or world diplomacy? It's one thing to teach an expertly written and professionally balanced curriculum; it's another to author one!

Where was the professional oversight to screen out the "filters" of bias? The result is not education — it is indoctrination.

Consider one of the "key concepts" drawn from the curriculum: "The American media has done little to broaden the debate or to embrace dissenting opinions on American foreign policy." Before our children are inundated with such propaganda, they should compare our robust media with those of other societies.

Particularly disturbing is the anti-American drooling from the Rethinking Schools Web site cited in the curriculum: "U.S. government is ill-placed to lecture the world about terrorism. Let's clarify with students what precisely we mean by terrorism. And then let's encourage students to apply this definition to U.S. conduct in the world."

As an American who recoils at the memory of 9-11, I am appalled by this interpretation equating U.S. foreign policy with terrorism. In fact, in the unit devoted to terrorism, there are no statements condemning it. If our intent is to graduate informed citizens of the world, perhaps we should teach them about the violent fundamentalist ideologies that threaten the West. Evil prevails on ignorance. We cannot afford to let our children be vulnerable because we didn't equip them with an incisive understanding of American democracy.

This curriculum overhaul was a done deal long ago. Supt. Bob Maxfield conceded as much when he argued it would be too difficult to can-

cel the new course because students registered months ago. To offer classes that have not even been examined by the executive curriculum committee is an egregious circumvention of educational responsibility. Classes are canceled for much less compelling reasons.

Our district's party line that it doesn't micromanage is also a lame defense, especially given the board's word-by-word dissection of an athletic manual whose importance can be no greater than a curriculum impacting all our students.

Our mandate is clear. We must return to the drawing table to ensure we deliver the finest education in the context of the principles and values that shape our country. We will have failed if we graduate students with just a passing familiarity of American government. They must be intimately aware of what makes America unique.

Our country, our world is at a dangerous crossroads. We had better proceed with caution before there is no turning back.

Linda Slutberg is a Farmington Hills resident.

Citizens urged to help combat West Nile

The city of Farmington Hills is taking action to reduce the local mosquito population and combat the spread of West Nile virus.

City workers have treated all city-owned storm sewer catch basins on public property with a slow-release larvicide, known to kill mosquitoes that breed inside these structures.

Since the city's program is limited to parks, municipal facilities, and public right-of-ways, private citizens are urged to take the following steps themselves:

- Eliminate standing water - Mosquitoes breed in stagnant, polluted water. Eliminate these habitats by emptying and cleaning out clogged rain gutters, children's swimming pools, birdbaths, unused tarps, or anything that traps water for a few days. (Healthy wetlands, running water in creeks or tributaries, or non-stagnant water in retention areas are not considered mosquito breeding areas.)
- Treat private storm water catch basins - There are many private storm sewer structures located in backyards, side

yards, and subdivision open spaces. The bottoms of these structures are prime mosquito breeding grounds.

These can be treated easily with a drop-in larvicide, available from local retailers. Look for the mosquito control product displays.

Educate yourself about West Nile virus - Through mailings, the city Web site, and articles in the local paper, the city is providing residents with information about this public health issue.

Reduce the risks of contracting the virus - In areas where there are weeds, tall grasses, or bushes, protective clothing such as long pants and long-sleeved shirts should be worn.

The use of insect repellents is also recommended. Follow manufacturers' safety directions, especially for use with children.

Working together in a community-wide effort, citizens can help reduce the mosquito population and decrease the spread of West Nile virus.

If you have questions about West Nile virus prevention efforts, please call the DPW at (248) 871-2850.

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