

OUR VIEW

Don't add language at the expense of other classes

Traverse City Area Public Schools should think twice before adding foreign language classes to the elementary school schedule. The threat of deep funding cuts next year may have stalled a TCAPS initiative to introduce such classes. But if the budget doesn't stall the plan, the district should not slash the proven value of music, art and physical education in the primary-school curriculum to make room for an added language.

There is no doubt that elementary-age children could benefit from exposure to a second language.

But to work this new subject into the elementary curriculum almost certainly would cut into class time now devoted to music, physical education and/or art. All three are valuable parts of the primary school experience. Music and art help nurture creativity and imagination, and keep many kids interested in attending school. Physical education helps instill the value of health and fitness, something most Americans need to work on, and a growing problem among our youth.

Both physical education and music at the elementary level begin the process of developing kids' interest and proficiency in school programs that build throughout the school experience — sports, band and choir. To weaken these programs at the primary level would send shockwaves on up through high school and could deprive some of the chance to develop lifelong passions.

The concept of adding a foreign language to the

elementary curriculum stems from the fact that Michigan students who graduate from high school in 2016 or later will be required to earn at least two credits in a foreign language. Most college-bound students already take two

credits of a foreign language during their high school years. And learning a new language at that level, rather than when they are younger, allows students the opportunity for overseas study and class trips.

Would grade-school classes give students the enduring familiarity with a foreign language required to pass a proficiency test in high school?

Are current TCAPS teachers qualified to teach French, German or Spanish? Or would the district need to hire specialized teachers at additional expense?

If the budget — and community input — allow this initiative to become reality, TCAPS needs to tread lightly around existing physical education, music and art programs.

If foreign language eventually is added to the elementary school curriculum, it might be wise to choose a single language to teach in elementary school, both to simplify the teaching process and to give students more opportunity to interact and practice with each other.

Given the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S. and the presence of a local Spanish-speaking population, Spanish would be the logical choice.

But right now, TCAPS needs to concentrate on keeping things running within the shrinking budget. The basics — reading, writing and arithmetic — must come first.

The issue

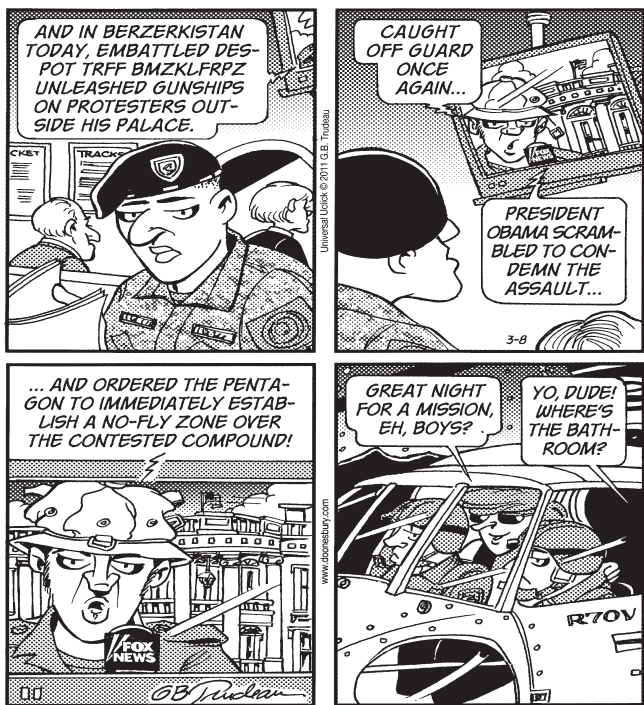
Foreign language in primary school

Our View

Not at the expense of other programs

To weigh in with your opinion on today's editorial viewpoint, vote in our online poll at record-eagle.com.

DOONESBURY



OPINION

Tuesday, March 8, 2011

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Mike Keefe THE DENVER POST 3-4-11 www.caglecartoons.com



YOUR VIEWS

Prescription for decline

Can Americans be manipulated into creating their own downfall?

The Koch brothers, billionaire CEOs, own the second largest privately held company in America, Koch Industries, including Georgia Pacific, Stainmaster, oil refineries, chemical and fertilizer companies, plus financial and investment groups.

The Koch brothers fund many political candidates, are the money behind "grass-roots" organizations like Americans for Prosperity, leading to the creation of the Tea Party.

These groups have cleverly pitted American against American. Add a few Rush Limbaughs, Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reillys, and other agitators, and the stage is set. Divide and conquer.

A proper mix in Congress makes it possible, and profitable, for corporations to

Letters policy

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Political endorsement letters are limited to 100 words.

All letters must contain the author's name, which will be published along with the author's town of residence, plus the author's signature, address and telephone number for verification purposes.

Writers submitting letters by e-mail must provide a working return e-mail address. Letters are subject to editing.

export American jobs.

Employment and wages plummet in an attempt to compete, and labor unions are broken. American people lose their homes. Health insurance is a luxury. Soon, a good public education will no longer be available to the average person.

The result is a nation of poor, uneducated, unhealthy, homeless people so desperate they'll work for pennies. The process is complete. You've created a nation full of slave laborers, a broken people with no

rights and no power.

Impossible you say? Just close your eyes and see what happens.

Barbara Bernier
Manistee

Gillman should resign

I watch a lot of public meetings televised on Channel 99. I get goose bumps during the opening Pledge of Allegiance, especially the final six words: "with liberty and justice for all."

For all. People of color. People of a gazillion ethnic

groups. People of all religions (or none). Rich people. Poor people. Old folks and young children. Ultra-conservatives and flaming liberals. Gays, lesbians, women, and yes, even straight white guys.

I notice (County) Commissioner Jason Gillman (he's the one nattily-attired at every meeting in the tea party's signature colors of black and bright yellow) reciting the Pledge with great passion.

Yet in his recently penned Record-Eagle Forum piece (Feb. 27), Jason acknowledges his own "reservations about homosexuality on moral, aesthetic and health grounds."

If he really feels this way, maybe Jason should skip those final six words of the Pledge.

Or better yet, resign from his County Commission office.

Ann Laurence
Traverse City

FORUM

Farm Bill principles and crop insurance

BY TOM ZACHARIAS

America's abundance of affordable and nutritious food is the envy of the world. This is not an accident, as our long history of investment in agricultural infrastructure has made this possible. Underpinning this system is crop insurance's modern public/private partnership that provides a safety net for farmers, helping them manage price and weather risks.

USDA's Agricultural Outlook conference speech by Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, outlined her principles for the upcoming Farm Bill. She urged us not to look at the lens defined by budget cuts or specific programs but instead from principles like "creating the best safety net and the best tools possible for managing risk."

Ask any Michigan farmer — or any American farmer — what fits this bill, and crop insurance will be among the first responses. Crop insurance provides

protection to producers of the Great Lakes state's lucrative specialty crops — like the well-known tart cherry crop — should prices crash or Mother Nature deal an unwelcome blow. In fact, it is the only safety

net tool available for most fruit and vegetable growers. It is easy to see why crop insurance has gained so much popularity with farmers. In

fact, more than 1.1 million policies covering 256 million acres across the U.S. were written in 2010 to deal with risks. Nationally, this public/private partnership enabled the government to turn a modest investment into nearly \$80 billion in protection in 2010.

Stabenow wants the Farm Bill to be based on the notion that farmers know better than anyone else what works for them. A major strength of today's crop insurance program is that

it allows farmers to create individualized risk management solutions tailored to their specific risks.

When catastrophe hits, the only thing protecting many producers from bankruptcy is crop insurance, which is streamlined by the efficiency of private sector delivery. And banks are increasingly relying on crop insurance, knowing fully that the money they loan farmers for food production is partially secured by this program.

Unfortunately, this risk management tool has been put under the budget-cutting microscope in recent years. Lawmakers in search of budget offsets for other, often non-farm priorities, have already substantially reduced funding.

Bill Murphy with USDA's Risk Management Agency recently cited an agency report that indicated current investments in crop insurance are delivering a significant bang for the buck. The persuasive attributes of crop insurance, despite the funding reductions already taken, underscore a program that is cost effective and sustainable.

The U.S. agricultural sector is a source of deep economic strength and stability. As weather-driven crop failures globally cause price fluctuations and food shortages we should be heartened by our fiscally sound crop insurance policies. As Stabenow also noted, "We need an effective safety net so that we aren't watching family businesses go under because of a few days of bad weather or market factors outside of their control." Indeed, crop insurance is attempting to meet this need not only in Michigan, but nationwide as well.

About the author: Tom Zacharias is the president of National Crop Insurance Services in Overland Park, Kan. His email address is tomz@ag-risk.org.

About the Forum: The Forum is a periodic column of opinion written by Record-Eagle readers in their areas of interest or expertise. Submissions of 500 words or less may be made by e-mailing letters@record-eagle.com. Please include biographical information and a photo.



Zacharias

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