

Officials defend grade policy

City schools keep minimum scores

Wednesday, January 07, 2009

By Joe Smydo, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pittsburgh Public Schools administrators last night defended a controversial policy that sets 50 percent as the minimum score a student may receive for classroom work, homework or marking periods, saying it's fair and mathematically logical.

The presentation to the school board Education Committee signaled that officials may tweak the policy but don't plan to abandon it. The handful of board members who attended the meeting offered little argument.

Some students have said they'd rather take a 50 percent than do work, and some are "shutting down" academically once they're satisfied with the grades they've compiled, according to a report by Jerri Lippert, executive director of curriculum, instruction and professional development.

There's also the complaint that the policy amounts to grade inflation and gives failing students a free ride.

Last night, for the first time, administrators publicly defended the policy to the board, saying the 50 percent minimum gives struggling students a chance to recover academically and an incentive to stay in school.

Under the policy, work scored from 100 percent to 90 percent is an A, from 89 percent to 80 percent a B, from 79 percent to 70 percent a C, from 69 percent to 60 percent a D and from 59 percent to 50 percent an E, the failing grade. Work may not be scored lower than 50 percent.

Dr. Lippert called the policy mathematically sound. If the E ranged from 59 percent to zero, she said, it would carry more weight than passing grades.

Newspaper Article #2

Time short for about 200 deer in Rochester Hills

Oakland Co. sheriff's sharpshooters are to start culling herd next month

Beginning in January, up to 200 deer could be killed in Rochester Hills by Oakland County Sheriff's Office sharpshooters, as the city begins reducing its deer population.

With more than 1,000 deer in the city, officials say the cull is necessary to curb vehicle-deer crashes. In 2007, 219 of those crashes occurred, a total that gave the city the highest rate of such accidents in the tri-county area.

But city officials won't release the days and locations of the culls. They say that keeping the information quiet will keep residents safe and prevent opponents from sabotaging the effort. Those against the cull, though, say that not releasing the times potentially puts residents in danger.

"We don't want anybody out there when we're doing it," said Lance DeVoe, the city's naturalist.

The only information the city and Sheriff's Office released is that the cull could happen on a few occasions in January and in February at select sites that are no less than 50 acres in size. The woods in Bloomer Park and sites off Hamlin and Avon roads might be selected, DeVoe has said.

He said the sharpshooters will be using suppressors on their rifles to muffle the sound of the shots and to prevent echoing.

"We think it's very disconcerting that the city doesn't want to tell the residents even near the sites when it's happening, where it's happening," said Don Hughes, an Auburn Hills resident who's a member of Residents for Safe Deer Management, a group that has actively protested the cull.

"We think it's very dangerous to have people out discharging firearms in the city."

Many of the deer-car collisions happen on roads around Oakland University. A large deer population lives in the wooded areas on campus. Mayor Bryan Barnett said he's approached university administrators about the deer problem, but he "hadn't gotten any indications from them that they're going to be on board" with participating in the cull.

Oakland University Police Chief Samuel Lucido said vehicle-deer accidents on campus are rare, partly because of the low speed limits.

Monique Balaban, a Rochester Hills resident who opposes the culling, doesn't believe it will be effective.

She proposed to the City Council that, among other things, the city install deer-deterring reflectors along roads and then postpone the cull for more than a year to measure the effectiveness of the reflectors.

"This isn't right, what they're doing," Balaban said. "They're not taking care of the residents' safety."

Source: Detroit Free Press. 5 March 2009

<<http://www.freep.com/article/20081231/NEWS03/812310386/1005/NEWS>>.

Newspaper Article #3

Michigan House reignites smoking ban debate

by The Associated Press
Tuesday September 23, 2008,

LANSING -- The Michigan House is preparing for another vote on legislation to ban smoking in Michigan workplaces, including bars and restaurants.

But it isn't immediately clear Tuesday afternoon if the expected vote will break a stalemate over what should be covered in the legislation.

The Democrat-led chamber has supported legislation that carves out exemptions to the smoking ban for casinos, smoke shops and some other businesses. The Republican-led Senate has passed legislation to ban smoking at all workplaces.

Without a compromise, there will not be a change in Michigan law that now lets restaurants and bars set their own smoking rules.

The House is considering possible amendments to the legislation Tuesday.

Source: *Michigan House Reignites Smoking Ban Debate*. Michigan News. 5 March 2009
<http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/09/michigan_house_reignites_smoki.html>.

Gas Prices Pump Up Support for Drilling

Support for Conservation and Environmental Protection Declines, More Favor Drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

July 1, 2008

Amid record gas prices, public support for greater energy exploration is spiking. Compared with just a few months ago, many more Americans are giving higher priority to more energy exploration, rather than more conservation. An increasing proportion also says that developing new sources of energy -- rather than protecting the environment -- is the more important national priority.

The latest nationwide survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted June 18-29 among 2,004 adults, also finds that half of Americans now support drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, up from 42% in February.

The public's changing energy priorities are most evident in the growing percentage that views increased energy exploration -- including mining and drilling, as well as the construction of new power plants -- as a more important priority for energy policy than increased conservation and regulation. Nearly half (47%) now rates energy exploration as the more important priority, up from 35% in February. The proportion saying it is more important to increase energy conservation and regulation has declined by 10 points (from 55% to 45%).

In surveys dating to 2001, majorities or pluralities had consistently said that greater energy conservation and regulation on energy use and prices was more important than increased energy exploration.

Source: *Gas Prices Pump Up Support*. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. 5 March 2009 <<http://pewresearch.org/>>.